





INDIAN WHIRLPools



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INDIAN WHIRLPOOLS

A Tale of Modern India

BY

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THE HISTORY OF THE

ROYAL NAVY

FROM THE FIRST

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CHAPTER I

THE POLO MATCH

It is the day of the final tie in the Canauj Polo Tournament. Two distinguished Cavalry Regiments bearing many polo triumphs on their list of honours are about to be pitted against one another.

The crowded pavilion testifies to the unusual interest which the match has aroused. A hospitable General and his staff are "*At home*": all the world and his wife are present from His Excellency the Governor down to the last joined Subaltern and budding "*Heaven born*."

By the side of the ground are ranged the mounts of the teams, the glossy coats and high condition of the ponies indicating many an anxious hour's effort. Intermingling with the animals can be seen orderlies and syces busy getting ready all the paraphernalia associated with a tournament.

As the appointed hour approaches the more prudent players are having a last look round in order to ascertain that all is right with leathers, girths, and bridles, before entering on what they know will be a titanic struggle.

Facing the pavilion on the opposite side of the ground, also along both ends, is packed a dense surging throng of Indians whose multi-coloured turbans and dark faces make a picturesque border almost kaleidoscopic in its variations. Here is to be seen a group of stalwart troopers eagerly discussing the chances of the teams and the respective merits of their sahibs who are playing; here a knot of bazaar folk; there a collection of cultivators: all drawn together by the magnetic influence of a congenial gathering.

What a superb afternoon it is ! a brilliant sky, and a deliciously gentle breeze giving that freshness so acceptable in India even during the cold weather. A perfectly kept green turf maidan encircled by thickly leafed trees forms a pleasing oasis amidst the surrounding khaki coloured landscape, delighting the eye, and stimulating in even the most slothful a yearning to take part in this king of games.

At last the hour approaches. A bugle call warns the players that it is time to mount. Within a few seconds out dashes Pertab Singh already famous as the *three* of James' Horse. Mounted on a magnificent grey Arab he passes in front of the pavilion taking the ball towards the goal with clean crisp strokes in a preliminary gallop ; his flowing turban and graceful mien conjuring up a picture of singular charm. He is rapidly followed by Smith, the deadly *two* of Raikes Lancers. Then follows Mead of the Horse on a fleet footed Australian mare and another Indian who plays *one* for the Lancers. But again the bugle sounds : the time-keepers and goal judges take their places ; the two umpires move on to the ground, whilst the scattered players gather towards the spot where play commences.

Each team now falls into its proper place astride the centre line, *one*, *two* and *three* marking their vis-à-vis with an earnestness of expression presaging no tame struggle during the ensuing forty-five minutes' play.

What a brave sight they are ! The bright blue jerseys of the Horse, the crimson colours of the Lancers, the eager faces of the players and restless excitement of the ponies, making a vivid, fascinating scene.

A sharp "are you ready" from the Umpire, a sudden cessation in the buzz of conversation round the ground, then the white gleaming ball is thrown

into play. A momentary mingling of colour as the two teams spring to the encounter, a stout bump as they collide in their efforts to secure the ball, and the great contest has commenced. It is instinctively felt by all that this match is to be no ordinary one. The two teams now pitted against one another have fought their way through the preliminary rounds with varying degrees of fortune. Both are convinced that the coveted trophy is within their grasp, and both are determined to annex it, and their determination is fanned to tenseness by a rooted though friendly rivalry.

The game opens at whirlwind pace accompanied by relentless hustling. Within a minute, the Horse having the better of the rapid exchanges, score amidst deafening applause from their partisans. This momentary success on the part of their adversaries merely acts as a spur to the Lancers, who securing the ball in mid-field, rush it to the Horse's goal, literally forcing it between the flags by the impetuosity of their onslaught.

The first period ends with the score one goal all.

During the next two chuckers, the spectators are treated to a brilliant exhibition of polo at its best. The blood of both sides is up : the players, stimulated by their opening encounter and astride mounts not yet jaded, excel in the strength and accuracy of their strokes. The rapidity with which the ball travels from one end of the ground to the other, the thrilling shots at goal, and miraculous saves, keep the onlookers spellbound.

Backwards and forwards sways the game, the two sides apparently so equally matched that it seems as if only the luck attending all games can decide the issue.

At half-time the scoring board registers two goals all.

In the fourth period the Lancers assert a distinct superiority, and by pinning James' Horse to the

defence, manage to secure two goals. Things look ominous for the Horse, but in a contest of this nature none can foretell the result until the final bugle sounds. On the conclusion of the chuckker their Captain exchanges a few words with his team before they mount—their opponents' lead must be wiped out before the final period is reached.

For a minute the Lancers look as if they will hold their own ; then the Horse, gathering themselves for a supreme effort, break away, and Pertab Singh, by the dazzling brilliance of his play, restores the fortunes of his team, for in rapid succession he hits the two goals which bring the score level at four goals all.

From the throw-in for the final bout the Lancers press the attack and a penalty for a foul by their adversaries again gives them the lead. Only three minutes remain before time will be called. During two of these the acute struggle continues without apparent advantage to either side ; then Mead, the Captain of James' Horse, springs clear of a *mêlée* in possession of the ball ; a dexterous stroke places it within range of a goal, and by a mighty drive he lofts it between the flags and equalizes just as the time bugle sounds.

The dripping players lead their mounts to the side of the ground. All bear marked traces of the contest, the men bespattered with dust and sweat, the ponies flecked with foam and even blood.

As the teams reappear on the ground for the extra period, the pent-up excitement of the concourse is intense. Not a word is to be heard, and everybody who can do so presses forward to view the final struggle.

A strenuous attack by the Lancers is hotly repelled by the Horse who force the ball towards their opponents' goal. It is evident that the tussle cannot last much longer as men and mounts are showing signs of complete exhaustion. A missed

backhander by the Lancers' *three* close to his goal is the penultimate incident of the contest: the Light Blues' *one* with an open goal before him puts the ball home.

An orderly if somewhat vociferous crowd breaks on to the ground and gathers in front of the pavilion. Ten minutes later, muffled in warm coats the winners stand facing the table on which the fine trophy is discernable in the now rapidly failing light. Her Excellency presents the cup; and with a few words of praise to both teams, hands it to the Captain of James' Horse.

Three cheers for the winners, followed by the same for the runners up, and yet another for the popular Governor and his consort, closes the day. The great concourse melts into the darkness. In a brief space the arena is utterly deserted, and nothing remains to mark the stirring match but a scarred and churned up ground.

.

Half an hour after the conclusion of the match, a considerable part of those spectators designated in India as the *Sahib Log* were again assembled at the hospitable Gymkhana Club, where, seated round tables or at the bar, they discussed the events of the afternoon's contest with that keenness which only India knows. The strains of a popular air played by the orchestra, intermingled with the cheerful chatter was to be heard. Many Indians were present, some with their wives whose multi-coloured saris added a tone most picturesque.

Round one of the tables was congregated a party of four, made up of a matronly yet well preserved worldly looking Englishwoman, her charge, a fair graceful girl typical of refined British beauty whose colouring marked her as a recent arrival from home; and two young Officers in polo attire.

An Indian, also in polo garb, was about to pass

when the taller of the two Englishmen rose and with a friendly gesture barred his further progress, and said :

" Here, Pertab, I want to introduce you to some friends, particularly to a lady who greatly admired your play to-day—Mrs. Chapman, allow me to introduce Thakur Pertab Singh of my Regiment who did such a lot to help us win."

Mrs. Chapman acknowledged the introduction by a somewhat frigid inclination of her head. Miss Chapman cordially held out her hand and Pertab took it without the slightest trace of that diffidence often noticeable with Indians on such an occasion.

" Do allow me to congratulate you on your victory, especially those two splendid goals you hit which really won the match," remarked the girl.

" That was nothing, Miss Chapman," replied Pertab Singh ; then glancing at his introducer, continued, " the victory was the work of Captain Mead, sahib."

" Well ! never mind by whose fault we won," chimed in Captain Mead, " but sit down and join us in toasting the victory in tea. By the way, Greatorix," addressing the other Englishman, " I don't think you've met Pertab Singh, have you ? Pertab Singh—Captain Greatorix of the Red Hussars."

Both men nodded to one another, then Mead pulling up another chair motioned Pertab Singh to a place beside Miss Chapman.

" Is this your first visit to Canauj, Miss Chapman ? " inquired Pertab Singh as he accepted a cup of tea from her.

" Yes, it is ; I have only been in India a month."

" And how do you like the country, that is, what you have seen of it ? "

" I think it wonderfully fascinating, but I would like to see India and meet the people apart from my own countrymen."

" Oh, indeed ! " remarked Pertab Singh, " have you been studying Pierre Loti's ' L'Inde ' sans les Anglais then, or what ? "

Mary Chapman cast a penetrating glance at the face of this handsome debonnair Indian which for the moment was turned towards Captain Mead in answer to some remark about the team's ponies. Here was a surprise. A considerable number of her countrymen hardly knew the Frenchman by name much less read any of his books, yet beside her was a highly accomplished polo playing Indian gentleman who anyhow knew of the writer even if only in a superficial way. Whilst thus mentally soliloquising she suddenly wondered how to re-engage his attention ; for to address him as *Mr.* Pertab Singh seemed an obvious solecism. Fortunately the problem was solved by his turning towards her :

" I expect Pierre Loti was too anglophobe for you, Miss Chapman," he said.

" Not at all, I read several of his works when at school in Paris."

At this juncture, Mrs. Chapman, gathering her belongings, remarked, " I think Mary, we must be going : you know we have that dinner at the Miles' at 8."

" May I call your car, Mrs. Chapman ? " proffered Captain Greatorix, " or can I take you and Miss Chapman home ? "

" Thank you very much for your offer, but if you would take Mary I will walk as it is only a short distance, and I arranged with the bearer to be here with a lanthorn—could you get him for me ? "

The party broke up. Mrs. Chapman having been seen off preceded by her servant, Captain Greatorix turned to Mary :

" Shall we take a short run or a short drink ? " he questioned.

" A short run, Captain Greatorix."

The car, a beautifully appointed two-seater Sunbeam, glided away into the dusk, and was soon purring its way along the great highway, the brilliant beams of its powerful headlights making the myriad particles of dust, which hang so thickly over any Indian road, appear like powdered silver.

"You seemed rather taken with that Indian Johnny, Miss Chapman. I don't like the way these *wogs* are thrust upon us like that."

"But he didn't thrust himself upon us, Captain Greatorix," replied Mary with a touch of resentment in her voice. "Captain Mead did the thrusting."

"Yes, I know, but I do not hold with Indians being admitted to our society like that on terms of equal familiarity. They would not permit us joining their social gatherings if their women folk were present."

"I am sure I don't know what to think about it, I have not been out long enough, but I am quite sure I'd prefer the acquaintanceship of—what do you call him—Pertab Singh, to that of countrymen of my own that I have met."

"Yes, I admit it, Pertab Singh is rather in a category by himself, but it is the principle I object to—welcoming Indians like this to the intimacy associated with the afternoon tea table."

Mary laughed.

"Surely you don't call afternoon tea an intimate affair. Why at home one selects the tea hour as especially appropriate for casual acquaintances."

"Yes, that's true, but in this country the casual acquaintance is generally disposed of by an invitation to dinner."

"How ridiculous," interrupted Mary. "I'd have thought a dinner a much more intimate affair than afternoon tea."

"Yes, some dinners, Miss Chapman, but I mean the usual *feed* to a caller in an Indian Cantonment."

"Well, I reserve judgment, Captain Greatorix, and

let's hope there is no colour question in the next world ; now home please as quickly as possible without charging a bullock cart."

The car soon drew up before the portico of the hotel where Mary was staying. "What about a hunt on Shylock to-morrow, Miss Chapman ? I'll bring him round at 7 if you like, and that will give us plenty of time to get to the meet at Ganeshganj."

Mary considered a moment. She had only known Captain Greatorix a week and this was the second time he had offered to mount her. Should she or should she not accept ? Why not ? The one advantage of living in India is quick, irresponsible, acquaintanceship.

"Thank you very much, I shall be delighted ; 7 o'clock, then. Goodnight."

Mary went straight to the small, inexpensive, two-room suite she and her mother occupied in the jerry built building ironically designated The Hotel Majestic. She found her mother sitting by the fire in the sitting-room, and judging by her expression that something had incurred her displeasure, immediately prepared for the usual lecture.

"Sit down a minute, Mary, before we change ; I did not at all like your excessive cordiality this evening towards that Indian. I know nothing whatever about him, and I am surprised at Captain Mead introducing him as he did. Indians are so apt to misinterpret such situations ; anyhow I strongly disapprove of this modern tendency to accept them all in our little social gatherings ; also what was the nonsense I overheard you talking about—some French books you had read at school : I am beginning to think I made a great mistake in sending you to Paris."

Mrs. Chapman during the delivery of this little diatribe had worked herself, as she always did where her daughter was concerned, into a state of resentment.

Since her arrival in India, Mary had already experienced several acute differences with maternal authority, and decided on this occasion to smooth the ruffled feathers of her parent.

"I am sorry, Mother, if I again startled you, as I always seem to be doing, but without a previous warning about Indians, how else could I receive Pertab Singh? I fail to see why, because he happens to be an Indian, he should be treated with incivility."

"Now, Mary, you are distorting my meaning in the provoking way you have. There is a difference between the obvious cordiality with which you welcomed the creature and a courteous interchange of a few commonplace remarks."

Mary nearly made a grimace, and was about to utter some pungent comments on the word *commonplace*, but recovering herself rang the bell for her bath.

"I am afraid mother and I am in for a bad time of it," she murmured to herself, as she made her way to the dressing-room.

She was soon ready, and in due course they arrived at the house of their host. Mary found herself taken into dinner by an elderly person wearing tinted spectacles. It took her some time to discover what he was, but his obvious interest in an accidental remark by someone concerning the Asako columns scattered about India disclosed his vocation, and Mary was able to acquire quite a comprehensive outline of India's past from the lips of one who commanded an international reputation as an archæologist—and she enjoyed it quite as much as the Great Man, a point specially emphasized when she retired with the other ladies to participate in the vacuous conversation.

Now although Mary was inclined to be a bit of a *blue stocking* she prided herself on being able to adjust her temperament to any environment, but the ordinary small talk of an Indian drawing room taxed her patience to almost breaking point. Being still

too young to conceal her thoughts entirely, she gave her own sex the impression that she suffered from intellectual conceit, and the result was that she set up an estrangement quite undeserved. On this occasion her aloofness seemed particularly marked, and she had thus to content herself with the seclusion of her own thoughts until the men came in ; but again she was disappointed, as the remainder of the evening was devoted to an indifferent exhibition of musical talent on the part of a few guests.

The entertainment was mentally noted for entry in her diary as " Dined with the Miles. Dr. Raymond, the eminent archæologist, who took me into dinner, interested me vastly, otherwise the evening was rather boring."

On the way home in the ramshackle tonga, Mary, by way of breaking the silence which was becoming a marked feature when she and her mother were together, inquired whether all Indian dinner party menus were the same, for, as she added with a gay laugh, " If one excludes the lay out of the table, the courses are almost identical ; at least the hors d'œuvre, soup, and fish are, also this is the fourth dinner in succession at which I have been confronted with iced asparagus."

" Really, Mary, you are a most extraordinary child," replied her mother. " I thought the dinner excellent and most enjoyable."

Mary made a derisive gesture.

" That is probably because you have been so long out in India, Mother," she said : " you've forgotten what a nicely arranged dinner in England is like."

After a moment she added inconsequently : " I think I told you I was going hunting to-morrow with Captain Greatorix who has offered me a mount."

This adroit change of the subject restored harmony.

" I wonder what would have been said if it had been Pertab Singh," thought Mary.

CHAPTER II

A HAZARDOUS RIDE

Seven o'clock saw Mary ready for the ride. She knew she was no horsewoman when measured against those of her sex who ride to hounds in the old country, but for all that she loved these outings in the bright morning air, and, on a tractable mount, felt perfect confidence. Having no prejudices to discard she had adopted the cross saddle, and, considering her very recent introduction to a horse, made a graceful figure on horse back.

Captain Greatorix was awaiting her in the vestibule.

"Good morning, Miss Chapman; you are punctual!"

"Am I?" replied Mary, laughing, "in that respect I differ from the rest of my sex."

"That means, I suppose, I cannot have the cup of coffee I've just ordered."

"I am afraid not. Let's mount and be off," she replied, leading the way to the outer door, where they passed into the cold and slightly misty air of an up-country mid-winter morning.

Two semi-frozen syces holding the mounts, brightened up at their master's approach, knowing well that a friendly fire round the corner with nothing to do for two hours lay ahead of them.

Captain Greatorix held Shylock while Mary mounted; then swung himself into the saddle with that graceful ease only acquired by the accomplished horseman. A short walk brought them to the end of the tar-mac road, where they started off at a slow gallop across the level plain.

They reined up for a few moments to watch Ricketts Horse at drill.

"How gracefully the men ride!" exclaimed Mary to her companion.

"Yes, Miss Chapman: in that respect the Indian trooper surpasses the British; all the same, I believe the squadron of my Regiment would ride the lot down if it came to a real scrap."

"Do you really think so?" replied Mary sarcastically.

"Certainly I do, especially if they had not got their British officers."

"Oh, now we are getting on to a contentious subject," Mary interrupted: "I think we'd better push on."

Captain Greatorix eagerly assented—watching Regimental drill was not exactly a pastime.

In a few moments they joined up with several other enthusiasts heading for the meet, all jogging along the remaining half-mile to where the master, whips, and hounds were waiting the arrival of a few more members before moving off.

A meet in India lacks all those picturesque attributes and social inter-mingling which are such a dominant feature in England. To begin with, the garments of those attending it are inexpressibly dull—a pith sun topi is a very poor substitute for a silk hat, especially where the feminine sex is concerned. Only the master, and possibly the whips don hunt uniform. Instead of a village green or lawn of some stately mansion the eye has to endure a sun-baked drab-coloured open space almost devoid of vegetation. As far as the eye can see there stretches an undulating, pale khaki, plain, dotted here and there with vivid patches of green, denoting crops—probably irrigated—or a few dust laden trees. A more complete antithesis of the beautiful rural landscape which forms the setting of an English hunt, could hardly be found. Then

from a social gathering point of view, the followers are of similar standing. There are no great land-owners—or perhaps one should say commercial magnates—no farmer Georges, no dealers nor anything approaching thereto. The personnel is entirely lacking in those *characters* which go so far towards giving an English hunt its distinctive charm. An outsider chancing on an Indian Meet would be struck by the monotonous uniformity in speech, appearance and gesture of those present : yet for the ardent sportsman, hunting a jackal has its attractions, and on the principle of half a loaf being better than no bread, the Englishman extracts from it no small measure of enjoyment.

Mary, like many of those who find their way to India, had been reared in a suburb, and hunting of any sort was a novelty to her. She had heard it lauded or derided—the latter, generally by people who knew nothing about it—and was prepared to plumb its possibilities with an open mind, her chief hope being that she shouldn't fall off or make herself ridiculous.

The master soon moved to a neighbouring patch of sugar cane—a favourite resort for Jack. This proving blank, hounds were put on to a dried-up river course covered with stunted bushes. Here they found, and scent being good, away they went at full cry.

Mary experienced considerable trouble in managing Shylock ; fortunately the *going* was good and the sharp burst exhausted the excessive high spirits of her mount. A slight check at a patch of Jhow grass enabled her to rearrange her reins which had got themselves into a sad tangle ; also, generally collect herself. The Jack having been viewed away by someone, hounds, followed by the field, were off again.

A nasty thorn hedge with a ditch in front, beyond which an extensive area of quite thick jungle

was to be seen, held up the greater part of the field. Mary, whose blood was now up put Shylock straight at the obstacle where she had seen one or two others clear it. Shylock, disliking thorns, jumped so big, that his rider, who had never negotiated a fence before found herself clinging round his neck, and it was only by a great effort that she managed to regain the saddle. Her mount, now quite convinced that he was master of the situation took complete charge. Mary made frantic efforts to collect her reins with one hand whilst clinging to the pommel with the other. Shylock's erratic course through the patch of jungle added to her difficulties—every moment she expected to fall off. Her sun hat had worked itself to a forward position, charitably concealing what, to her, would have appeared inevitable disaster. This opportune intervention of the hat was her salvation, since Shylock, being no novice, was quite well able to take care of himself, and having caught the more advanced part of the field, and being held up by another check, slowed to trot.

Mary realised that someone was speaking to her. The words : " Hello, Miss Chapman ! You look a bit deranged ; I hope Shylock has been behaving himself ; allow me to hold his reins while you straighten your head-gear," announced to her that a much needed respite from her perilous position was at last forthcoming. Shylock came to a stand-still rather abruptly, and Mary, exhausted by her struggles, again plunged forward on to his neck, her topi completing its descent over her face. Having pushed herself back into the saddle she rearranged her hat, but in doing so, used both hands quite oblivious of the whereabouts of the reins. However, vision being now restored, she was able to take stock of her surroundings, and also to thank Captain Greatorix for his timely assistance. A good part of the field were coming up, amongst

which Mary noticed with much satisfaction the majority of her own sex. Hounds being at fault the master was busy with them trying to pick up the line.

"You came along in great form," remarked Captain Greatorix "but I think you had better gather up the reins again as judging by the music, hounds have struck the line. These sun hats are vile affairs; I often wish for my bowler."

Mary made a quizzical gesture.

"I ought to be grateful to my topi," she said. "Had it not behaved as it did I believe I'd have fallen off, but not being able to see a soft place to land on I stuck to my mount. Then those tiresome trees! I am quite certain Shylock and I would never have agreed which side of them to go—I was saved that dilemma."

Further conversation was stopped by hounds racing away. The going was above reproach now and Mary had no difficulty in managing Shylock. Having a good lead, the Jack covered two or more miles before the pack began to close. Mary was just able to discern a brownish grey object ahead which now and again, for the space of a second became visible. But the chase was almost over. The quarry, obviously tiring, began to remain in sight. A hound swifter than the rest drew close; when almost level he turned in sharply at the Jack. The latter rolled over, but was up and off again: the infinitesimal delay was fatal; three or four hounds tackled him: down he went again; and as he struggled to his feet, was overwhelmed by the entire pack.

Mary closed her eyes. The final scene as he was torn to pieces revolted her; indeed for a moment she felt as if she would faint; only a supreme effort enabled her to stifle the sensation.

She turned Shylock about and dismounted. Captain Greatorix who was close by, offered to hold her reins, but she declined as they afforded her the

excuse of leaning against her mount's shoulder. The dizziness and slight nausea soon passed off, but came on again when the Master, accompanied by Captain Greatorix, presented her with the brush.

"I believe this is your first appearance with The Canauj Hunt, Miss Chapman, so let me present you with this small memento."

Mary took the bedraggled trophy, just managing to choke down her repugnance while she thanked the Master for the compliment; then turning to Captain Greatorix asked him to take charge of the, to her, offending relic.

"I suppose this ends the morning's sport," she added.

"Yes, once the sun is really up scent goes, so we can make our way home as soon as you like, but first let us get a drink and a sandwich or two off the camel which I see the thoughtful secretary has provided."

Mary joined a throng about the refreshments. A little claret cup, a couple of excellent sandwiches, and conversation with several acquaintances soon made her forget the disturbing incidents.

Hacking home with Captain Greatorix she found Shylock a very different creature, indeed at times had to urge him; she felt singularly elated at her first initiation to hunting and made up her mind to see more of it if she could. When her escort in saying goodbye to her at the hotel asked her to reserve for him four dances at the ball which was to take place that evening at Government House, she gladly assented, and added: "I have enjoyed the morning enormously and thank you ever so much for mounting me."

"I thought you would, Miss Chapman, in spite of your reputed *high brow* views and dislike of kills—yes I noticed that—but you'll get over it and become quire a sturdy champion of destruction."

"Perhaps," laughingly replied Mary. "I wonder

if Mr. Wells has ever tried it—he seems adamant on the subject.”

“Ah! you have me there, as I must plead ignorance of that person’s views on the subject.”

Mary dismounted, patting Shylock as his syce took charge. “Au revoir till this evening,” she called out as she joined her mother on the verandah.

CHAPTER III

THE BALL AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

The guests were still arriving in considerable numbers when Mary and her mother drew up at Government House.

Mrs. Chapman was one of those to whom the duties of chaperoning a daughter at a ball was a very real responsibility. To protect her daughter from forming any undesirable acquaintanceship was a fetish, her excuse being that the modern ballroom—not excluding that at Government House—was denized by importunate and designing young men of doubtful morals, but more important still, dubious position.

Mary was therefore carefully shepherded from the cloakroom to the precincts of the ball room where her mother stood sentinel over the operations of programme filling.

What a galaxy of colour ! The officers in their uniforms representing two distinct decades, pre-war and post-war—age and youth ; exalted Indians resplendant in gorgeous vestments glittering with jewels, the *heaven-born* in their yellow faced dress clothes, many wearing the insignia of some order. Then the Englishmen, and the Indian holding no *uniformed* position—perhaps a great captain of industry, or some hardworking Railway, Canal, or Postal Officer, whose simple evening attires lent an appropriate emphasis not only to themselves but the entire scene.

And what of the other sex whose absence from a function of this nature or indeed any function, robs it of all its lustre ? Certainly London, New York, or

Paris, might claim a more opulent display of gems, or even frocks, but considering the limited means available—and few come to India for their health—the average Englishwoman in India, not only does credit to herself, but to her race. All those trifling etcetras which go to make up an attractive appearance so abound in India's bazaars that any woman of taste can, for a relatively small outlay, ensure a becoming attire.

The well-shaded lights and floral decorations all harmonised with the scene, and the witchery of it so lured Mary's attention that she almost neglected the filling of the few gaps left in her programme for casual partners. Her mother's voice jogged her back to realities.

"We ought to be moving towards the ballroom if we are not to miss their Exs.' entrance."

Just at that moment Mary noticed an Indian approaching through the throng. He was dressed in the mess kit of his Regiment. She seemed to recognise the face, but could not put a name to it; then suddenly she remembered. It was Pertab Singh.

As he approached nearer she smilingly acknowledged his somewhat diffident recognition. It was evident that he intended allowing himself to be swept forward with others. Chance diverted his path so as to bring him almost to the Chapmans where he was checked by those in front. Mary still being uncertain how to address him, affably greeted him with, "good evening," then, as the crowd round the ball room doors showed no sign of diminishing, she turned to her mother.

"Mother," she said, "You remember Pertab Singh at tea the other day, don't you."

Mrs. Chapman refused to hear, and even drew back into the crowd. Mary's temper rose. Such an act of studied discourtesy inflamed the growing hostility towards her mother, and brushing all her ordinary scruples aside she turned to Pertab Singh.

"Mother is a bit deaf," she said, "would you do me a favour and engage yourself to me for the third dance as I particularly want to fill it now?"

"I shall consider it a privilege, Miss Chapman," replied Pertab Singh with some perplexity; then holding out his empty programme before he made the entry, quizzically remarked that his card was not exactly encumbered with names.

An A.D.C. asked everyone to move into the ball-room where a lane was being made by the house staff preparatory to their Excellencies' entry.

Mrs. Chapman found a moment to administer a sharp rebuke to Mary.

"I cannot conceive what you are about. How could you behave as you did towards that Indian. I don't know what he will think of you. Englishwomen do not dance with Indians and I cannot permit you to flaunt the opinion of your countrymen by dancing with one, specially here."

"I shall do exactly as I choose, Mother, or, if you prefer it, leave the moment the state Lancers are over."

Further altercation was cut short by the strains of the National Anthem announcing the entry of the Governor and his consort. It was a pretty sight enhanced by the obvious popularity of both. Certain people may deride these proconsular efforts to maintain a mock court in our dependencies, but however ludicrous—even pathetic as at times they certainly are—they serve one useful purpose, namely keep alive a sense of Imperial unity.

The small cortège had reached the end of the ball-room where a space was being cleared by the Staff for the state Lancers, when suddenly a round shaped brown thing about the size of a cocoanut, apparently thrown from the direction of the gallery running along one side of the room, fell on the floor with an ominous thud close to where Mary and their Excellencies were standing.

For the space of half a second a deadly silence ensued, then Pertab Singh darting forward, lifted the object and flung it through one of the open French windows. A blinding sheet of light was followed by a terrific detonation which shook the building to its foundation and half numbed those assembled in the great room. A crash of splintering glass and falling débris followed. The electric lights, after being obscured for a moment, fortunately came on again revealing a scared, pallid-looking humanity. What was it? The incident had occurred so rapidly that it took a few moments for people to grasp the significance of the event. Then just when a panic seemed imminent, the Governor mounted the dais and asked for a hearing. Everyone turned in his direction to listen to the quiet even voice.

"A dastardly attempt on our lives has undoubtedly been made, and a ghastly disaster has been averted by the very gallant action of an Indian gentleman whom I have not yet had the privilege of knowing. I wish the ball to continue. No one inside the room has been injured and my Staff will attend to any casualties that may have taken place outside."

A momentary pause ensued, whilst an A.D.C. hastened to the Bandmaster. Immediately the strains of a popular air crashed out.

Englishmen felt that their chief representative had instinctively interpreted everyone's feelings, which could be summed up in *carry on*. Let the cowardly ruffians who had engineered the vile deed see, or hear, how their violence was treated by those they intended to intimidate.

His Excellency's wishes were promptly put into execution. Everyone felt that the best way of steadying the nerves was to take to the floor: indeed a sort of frenzied enthusiasm seemed to prevail until the termination of the dance when partners

hurried to the nearest seats to discuss the occurrence.

Mary found herself in full view of the spot where the bomb had fallen. Her partner happened to be a young Indian Civil Servant whom she had not met before but to whom she had been introduced by her mother that evening—one of those eligibles she sensed.

"I wonder how much more of this sort of thing we must endure before we begin to govern the country again. I think it is monstrous the way we positively encourage violence. It's lucky that plucky *wog* pounced on the infernal thing when he did, or a good many of us would have gone west."

"Yes, it was a courageous act, but tell me why do you allude to him as a *wog*—I am always hearing the term," replied Mary.

"Why everyone calls these Indians *wogs*, you know—from the golliwogs the kiddies play with."

"But how insulting!" broke in Mary. "I can see no reason for it: we'd feel very annoyed if we were repeatedly alluded to by a similar epithet; besides it is degrading to our alleged superior intelligence. Only yesterday, when waiting for our tonga I heard a Tommy say to another, 'Ere, Bill, 'alf a mo, let's see the coon Kings go'; alluding to the Princes who had been watching the polo. One excuses men like that, but not educated persons."

"You *are* severe, Miss Chapman; but it's a case of every one doing it, so one unconsciously moves with the procession, I expect."

"Yes," replied his partner with sarcasm, "you are like a pack of silly sheep or rather school boys when one or more of the popular seniors denounce a particular thing and all the others are expected to fall in with their views under pain of unpopularity."

"Well, I daresay you are right, Miss Chapman, but surely you have been a very short time in India to pronounce judgment."

" Long enough to have noticed that my countrymen seem determined to tar every Indian with the same brush. Didn't you say just now that you were a Balliol man. I'd have thought you'd have shown more tolerance—anyhow, more originality. One expects sheep and gap ideas in the Army owing to the imitative methods on which it is run ; however, there's the next dance, so let us postpone the controversy," said Mary rising as Captain Greatorix came to claim from her one of his dances.

" I think we'll all remember who our partner was for the first dance to-night ; I hope we shall meet again," replied the young Mandarin, whose self-confidence had been rudely shaken by Mary's onslaught.

The number of people who took part in the second dance were considerably fewer than in the first. Many seemed inclined to continue discussing the outrage, so Mary and her partner had plenty of room to do justice to their dancing, which was good.

" We get on well together, don't we ? " remarked Captain Greatorix as the dance coming to an end, they searched for a secluded spot.

" Yes, and unless partners do get on well together I for one don't care about dancing, I have no desire to be jerked round a room in order to avoid being a wall flower : I hate masque balls and all that sort of thing unless one fixes the whole thing up beforehand."

" What about these seats ; we can just get a glimpse of the ballroom, Miss Chapman, I don't think we shall get any others."

" Anything will do for me, Captain Greatorix ; let's take them."

Just then the Governor, accompanied by his Military Secretary, passed close by and entered the ballroom.

" He is looking worried," remarked Mary.

" I dare say he has got to see some of these detective people," replied Captain Greatorix. " No, I see

he is talking to General Sir Edmund Steel, and here comes our gallant Pertab being marched along by an A.D.C. I expect His Ex. wants to make his acquaintance."

Pertab Singh, led forward, made his bow to the Governor who warmly shook him by the hand after which the General evidently added his congratulations.

"I wonder what they'll do for him," remarked Captain Greaterix; "he has a tight hold of some of us, hasn't he?"

Again the music cut short further conversation. Pertab Singh detached himself from his exalted circle, and spying Mary as she entered the room, came forward. "Our dance, I think, Miss Chapman."

"Do you dance, Pertab Singh? Also I see your hand is bandaged; by the way, how ought I to address you?"

"Yes, Miss Chapman, I dance if you will honour me by being my partner; my bandaged hand will not be an impediment I hope—it got a bit singed by the bomb you know."

Mary said no more, but taking his arm swung into a delightful waltz. She was conscious that many eyes were upon them and felt her first thrill of notoriety. She saw her mother sitting with some elderly be-medalled officer obviously discussing them, and wondered whether she still disapproved of an Indian partner.

Pertab Singh, who had been educated in England, was completely anglicised. In speech, deportment and appearance (excluding his colour) he was a counterpart of many hundreds of young men turned out by the Universities, Sandhurst, and Woolwich. In addition, he came of a very old Rajput noble family that for generations had enjoyed a culture, which, if differing in many respects from that prevailing in Western Europe or the States, nevertheless inculcated the principle that denotes all gentle-

men, namely, *never to cause offence unintentionally*. Further, nature had been lavish in her endowments towards him. Patrician by birth he was one in appearance. He wore his European clothes with distinction. A scholar, an accomplished horseman and a good shot, he excelled in most things. Small wonder then that Mary found him a charming acquaintance and felt no trace of that embarrassing repulsion in his company which so many of her countrymen seemed to experience when associated with Indians.

During the dance only a few commonplace remarks passed between them ; when it ended Pertab Singh asked her where she would like to sit. Mary indicated two chairs in a quiet corner. Just for a moment they were silent, then Mary broke the ice.

" You never answered my question of how I ought to address you : I feel sure that Mr. is wrong."

Pertab Singh laughed. " I am sure I don't know : I am called so many different names by your countrymen not excluding the coon, but I suppose Mrs. Grundy would prefer Thakur Sahib although I'd much prefer Pertab, of if you must be complete, Pertab Singh."

" What does Thakur mean, and what do you know about Mrs. Grundy ? " inquired Mary.

" Thakur is a sort of hereditary title. In my part of India there still exists a nominal feudal system. Certain great landowners called Thakurs are under a shadowy obligation to produce so many men at arms should their overlord, a Rajah or Maharajah, require them to do so. I suppose they correspond to your barons of old. I am only a small one but my uncle is one of the twelve great Thakurs of the state."

" Then you own acres or perhaps square miles of territory, I suppose," interposed Mary.

" Yes, a good deal, but I prefer to refer to my property as so many million tons of sand, it being practically all desert ; that is partly the reason I am

in the Army—one cannot live on sand unless one can convert it into concrete or something. As to Mrs. Grundy I have more than a passing acquaintance with her ; you see my dark skin has a particularly disturbing effect on the old lady."

Mary could not help laughing at this whimsical outlook; then she added more solemnly, " Who could have thrown that beastly bomb and what made you risk your life by throwing it out ? "

" I didn't risk my life, Miss Chapman, I saved it. Had it exploded all of us near to it would have been killed, certainly the Governor, his party, you, your mother, and several others."

Mary noticing a slight emphasis on the *you*, looked keenly at her partner but beyond a playful smile on his lips and laughter in his eyes there was nothing in his manner which suggested anything other than self-preservation—or altruism—as the motive.

" As to who threw it," he continued : " probably one of the revolutionary zealots so beloved by your country's sentimentalists. As long as you English give your protection to the tall Poppies who instigate all these deeds you must not blame India. Your soldiers shoot down mill hands in Bombay who hardly know what they are rioting about, whilst those who urge them on are permitted to pour forth their vile insinuations unrebuked : that is one of the paradoxes of your Radicalism which while professing to benefit the masses, in practice destroys them ; but enough of this. Tell me, have you found time to visit the bazaar or look at some of the really wonderful works of art in one or two of the shops. You know Canauj is famous for its carving ? "

" No, I haven't been near the shops except the English ones, which, to one just out from home as I am, seem to be miserable places replete with the year old cast-off stock from Oxford Street. I'd love to see some of the real Indian ones."

" Then let me escort you, Miss Chapman. I will

show you some wonderful craftsmanship not on view to the ordinary shopper."

"I'd give anything to accept your invitation, Pertab Singh,—I will call you that when we are by ourselves—but I am sure Mrs. Grundy in the person of my mother would never permit it."

"Well! I suppose you will have to be provided with a chaperon—a very efficient one too—seeing I am in Indian; I'll arrange it if you will keep open to-morrow afternoon."

"I hate chaperons," replied Mary; "I am quite sure my mother would never permit such an expedition even with a dozen; she certainly would not come herself."

"Wait and see, Miss Chapman; I have overcome greater difficulties."

"Well, you will have to upset the fable of Mahomet and his Mountain then, that's all I have to say, Thakur Sahib, except I think we had better investigate what is happening as I hear no band and see some of the A.D.C.'s fussing round."

On reaching the ballroom Mary encountered her mother who imparted the information that supper was being served at once. Everyone was expected to leave immediately: there had been some serious disturbance in the city, it seemed, which had necessitated the troops being ordered out, and consequently many officers had been called away.

Mary turned to say goodnight to Pertab Singh, but he had gone.

"Why not go home at once, Mother; supper under these conditions will be a boring ordeal."

"We can't go yet, Mary, as Major James who is taking us away has had to go off in his car and he won't be back for a little while. I think we had better get something to eat while we wait."

They seated themselves at a table already occupied by two elderly civilians neither of whom they knew: so the conversation—chiefly about the

weather—was of a desultory description. Mary was heartily thankful when Major James arrived and a move was made for home.

During the short drive to the hotel she maintained a discreet silence and wondered whether her mother would broach the subject of Pertab Singh's act of bravery, but on this occasion Mrs. Chapman had the good sense to keep her own counsel.

As they passed through the lounge Mary noticed that it was full of people evidently discussing the events of the evening, also that at her entrance many turned to glance towards her. She hastened her steps and retired to bed at once without exchanging a word beyond goodnight with anyone.

CHAPTER IV

MAHOMET AND THE MOUNTAIN

For some time Mary could not sleep. The startling events of the day, the chance circumstances that had led to the renewal of her acquaintance with Pertab Singh, his bravery and interesting personality—all had fired her brain, and it was well into the early hours of the morning before she found repose.

The Ayah woke her with the morning tea. Mary, sitting up, wondered if she had been dreaming. Having finished her Chota hazari she called to the Ayah to bring an early morning paper. Yes, there it was in lurid type :

BOMB OUTRAGE AT THE GOVERNMENT HOUSE BALL.
and in another column :

DISTURBANCES IN THE CITY.

STREETS PICKETTED.

Then followed a somewhat mutilated account of the outrage.

" I don't think there will be any visiting in the bazaar to-day," thought Mary as she dressed.

Breakfast over, she strolled across to the hotel office to get the letters and took them to a sunny place in the verandah. The English mail was just in, and there was therefore quite a budget to engage her attention. As she sorted them out she noticed two that had not been through the post : one for her mother, one for herself ; both being in the same handwriting. Having handed over her mother's post she opened the unstamped one, to find that it was from Captain Mead's sister asking her to join

them at lunch and play Mah Jong that afternoon ; a postscript was attached asking her to telephone if she was coming. She put it on one side while she began to go through the mail, but her mother had at once noticed the unposted note and opened it.

" Lucy Mead wants you to join them at lunch and play Mah Jong dear : I hope you will go."

Mary considered a minute. She had once or twice toyed with the game, when for a short period it had threatened to offer an alternative to Bridge. Supposing Pertab Singh succeeded in making some arrangement for visiting the bazaar, her acceptance of the Mead invitation meant disappointing him. On the other hand with the bazaar closed and the streets picketted she came to the conclusion that his chances of effecting his purpose were too remote to need consideration, and she decided to accept.

" Yes, Mother, I will certainly go : and will ring Lucy Mead at once as she has also written to me, asking me to 'phone my reply."

On her way she passed the hotel notice board on which was displayed an official intimation that the Bazaar was closed except to those on duty : also, side by side with it, was a request signed by the Commissioner asking all guests not officially employed at Canauj to make early arrangements for their departure.

" Well," thought Mary, " that settles Pertab Singh's venture : what a nuisance and a disappointment."

It took her some minutes to get through to the Meads. An Indian answered and to the untutored ear the chi-chi replies of the servant were unintelligible ; indeed, the whole affair reminded her of one of those comic telephone records on the gramophone. As she struggled with the instrument she thought how the good people of London anathematise their telephone service, little knowing the real torture that prevails in most countries, especially in India,

where diversity of language accentuates the difficulties. However, she was eventually able to convey to the *listener in* that she was coming to lunch that afternoon, closing the wrangle to the sound of "if you please, thank you."

She felt exhausted and very hot after hanging up the instrument.

Her mother was still busy with the mail when Mary interrupted her in order to impart the notice board information.

"What day do you intend going, Mother?"

After pondering a moment, Mrs. Chapman looked up. "I thought something of the sort might spoil our little visit, dear," she said. "If it isn't bombs it's plague, or a railway strike or hartal. I think we'd better say to-morrow evening: that will give us time to pack up, also let your father have some warning; being in camp with the Regiment it will take him some hours to get the bungalow ready."

"All right, Mother. I am going off to scribble a letter or two and then change my frock."

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One o'clock found Mary at the Mead's camp. There was something about living in tents that appealed to her—as it does to most people until they have to do so. The queer smell, compounded of a wood fire and mouldy canvas, must awaken in us some nomadic sense.

The Meads being anything but well off, their camp was severely spartan, only boasting bare necessities. Still the rude simplicity of the furniture standing on a few threadbared dhurries struck a more appropriate note than some of the super luxurious fittings seen in the tents of the exalted.

Mary had only met Lucy Mead once or twice before in company with her brother, and had at once been attracted by an unconventionality in her which was rare in military social circles. Lucy was one of

those privileged persons who do and say exactly what they like, quite regardless of popular opinion. She never posed, was no more affable to the great than to the humble, and never dressed for effect, but simply to please herself. Her obvious plainness was relieved by an attractive expression which suggested a strong personality inviting confidence—the sort which rarely marries and sooner or later makes itself famous.

She greeted Mary with the remark—"You are wrongly dressed for the part, my dear."

"What part?"

"Why, Mah Jong of course! One's garments must be *en rapport*—the brain won't function properly if occidentalized by association with Paquin. To tell you the truth, I haven't yet got the game, but we are to choose one this afternoon when lunch is over."

Mary took off her wraps and seated herself in a deck chair. Miss Mead went on to inform her that her brother would be arriving in a minute or two.

"And where are we to procure this game—from some wandering pedlar? I am a very poor performer, Miss Mead—in fact, a real beginner."

"That is well in advance of me. By the way, please call me Lucy, and let me return the compliment. The other day I was ushered into a room where the game was in progress; really I thought there must be several lap dogs concealed owing to the number of times I heard pings and pungs; so you see what a comprehensive grasp of the game I have. I merely mentioned Mah Jong to intimate an afternoon's engagement—sounded less *vampish* than Bridge. Now tell me about the outrage. I hear you actually had the temerity to dance with the hero—a sort of salome-like episode—everyone is discussing it."

"But we were engaged before the arrival of the bomb," replied Mary, colouring slightly.

“ All the more interesting.”

The sound of horses' feet on the gravel outside cut short the conversation. Captain Mead entered, followed by Pertab Singh, both in uniform.

What did it mean? Mary began to see that Pertab Singh had kept his word in part. This was no chance encounter although he spoke as if the meeting was purely accidental.

Mary thoroughly enjoyed the lunch : the conversation ranged over a variety of subjects all of which so interested her that the time seemed to slip by unnoticed until Miss Mead rose and said—“ We will get ready while you men arrange the car.”

Lucy Mead conducted Mary to her tent where two complete sets of Sisters of Mercy uniform were laid out. “ We must put these on, Mary, as we cannot go in our present frocks.”

Mary realising that some adventure was afoot quickly made the necessary change. Taking a peep at herself in the looking-glass she thought the costume rather suited her. It did, and Lucy Mead looking over the details to see that all was correct, declared that Gladys Cooper wasn't in it with our mother superior, whilst she herself looked like a militant suffragette escaping from the police.

When ready they found a closed car skilfully placed so that their entering it was quite hidden from view. Captain Mead was evidently to drive whilst Pertab Singh sat beside him.

“ Veils and blinds down remember, Lucy, and only the French lingo,” said her brother as they moved off.

By that indefinable aroma common to all Bazaars throughout India, the occupants of the car were soon aware that they had entered the city, where after a few sharp turns the car pulled up.

Pertab Singh opening the door they got down to find themselves in a deserted alley opposite a dingy looking house. Leaving Captain Mead in charge

of the limousine, Pertab Singh directed them towards a delapidated small gate through which they passed. They were now in a small courtyard on one side of which was a door giving entrance to a ramshackle building.

For a moment forgetting her injunctions Mary almost uttered a cry of delight in unmistakable English, but just managed to convert it into a non-committal gurgle, as she saw all around her every conceivable example of the carvers' art.

A garrulous, very portly Indian, engaged Pertab Singh in a vernacular tongue. During the dialogue the two girls examined some of the beautiful objects around them.

Pertab Singh then joined them while they looked over the wares on public view. He was able to explain in cultured French the special use and significance of many of the exhibits. When they had examined all that was worth seeing he beckoned to the portly Indian and having exchanged a few sentences with him they passed along a corridor which brought them to the workshops.

Here was to be seen a piece of work that had already taken two men ten years, yet was not complete : there a bit of exquisite carving unfinished because the mind and hand that wrought it had passed to the Great Beyond, no one with the requisite skill to carry on the work being obtainable.

" And who buys these lovely things ? " demanded Mary. " One never even sees them."

" An occasional globe-trotter from the States, a Maharajah, or Indian Merchant Prince, Miss Chapman," replied Pertab Singh. " A great many lie here unsold for years : that is the reason one sees so many good specimens, but come let us look at the workmen."

There were not many present, but those who were afforded an amazing example of industry. The apparent crude simplicity of their tiny cutting

tools, their wretched physique and miserable surroundings, would seem to preclude any possibility of successful achievement ; yet Mary was able to watch long enough to bear testimony to the perfection of their craft—the extreme antithesis of American quantity production.

The party returned to the outer showrooms, and were about to leave when the portly Indian beaming and salaaming presented each lady with a box wrapped up in an untidy piece of newspaper. Both thanked him in French which he acknowledged by a profound salaam.

On the way home Mary wanted to examine the contents of the parcels, but Lucy dissuaded her on the grounds that the car might be stopped and searched in which case the gifts might give them away, so the opening was postponed until they arrived in camp. The strings were then cut, and two beautiful sets of carved ivory Mah Jong pieces were disclosed.

“ Well ! ” exclaimed Mary, “ I anyhow have this to produce as evidence of how I spent the afternoon.”

“ Let’s have tea,” replied Lucy, “ I know it’s ready in the dining tent.”

The conversation at once drifted on to the afternoon’s excursion. Quite a lively discussion ensued concerning the particular article each would have purchased had money been no object ; then, during a momentary lull in the chatter Pertab Singh changed the subject by asking Mary when she was leaving as he had heard that all those not on duty or business in Canauj had been requested to depart.

“ We go off to-morrow evening.”

“ Leave to-morrow, Mary ! ” interposed Miss Mead. “ Why this indecent haste ? I wanted to show you one of India’s greatest tombstones—the old deserted city of Lalpur—no one really believes that the Local Government expects anyone to take

their cold-footed scuttling suggestion seriously : wait till you are evicted. What do you think, Pertab Singh, don't you agree ? ”

“ I'd prefer not to express an opinion, Miss Mead, especially in tented walls with servants about : Don't you think I am right, sahib ? ” turning an inquiring glance on Captain Mead and raising his eyebrows significantly.

“ Yes, Lucy, I think we had better not discuss the subject here, also I am sure Miss Chapman will have plenty of other opportunities to view what you designate as a tombstone, not excepting our own particular Babylon now rearing its head at the Capital.”

“ Oh ! you'd stop all intelligent conversation, Jack,” replied his sister ; “ you call it being discreet but my own opinion is that all this precious discretion is a huge indiscretion.”

“ Well, old girl, I am not going to argue the point, so let us return to the other tent and lay out the Mah Jong as a salve to Miss Chapman's conscience.”

The pieces were all examples of rare workmanship.

“ These are historic sets,” remarked Pertab Singh, “ but unfortunately they are not much use for playing the game as unless you are acquainted with Chinese you can't read the numbers or distinguish the winds so if you want them for use, Miss Chapman, you will have to desecrate them by writing on them. As a set off against this, the users are supposed to be immune from plague. Ivory, you know, being a living substance at one time, absorbs some queer things whilst growing, and although I don't put much faith in these myths, one can never tell.”

“ I am sure we are both greatly indebted to you Pertab Singh,” declared Miss Mead. “ I certainly shan't deface them by adding vulgar Western numbers or whatever is necessary, but if ever I get entangled with a plague epidemic I'll embroider

my frocks with the scoring chips or make a necklace of the really smart tiles."

"I must be off," said Mary, glancing at her watch, "so please call my tonga, Captain Mead."

"I sent it away the moment it arrived, Miss Chapman; Lucy will drive you home in the car."

As Mary was ready before the car appeared, she sat down and began chatting to Pertab Singh.

"I wonder where we shall meet again, Miss Chapman," he said. "I am sure it will not be long before we encounter one another. India is the smallest country in the world where soldier folk are concerned; don't forget I succeeded in bringing the mountain to Mahomet," he added, as Miss Mead took her place at the wheel and the car moved off.

As soon as they were out of earshot, Lucy Mead turned to Mary.

"Now don't be offended, but avoid meeting him again. I arranged to-day's little affair at his request just to see what was behind it all. The fates have somehow brought you two together. I like Indians and in particular Pertab Singh, but take my advice, cut him out of your thoughts before thinking about him becomes a dangerous habit."

"Really, Lucy, you are somewhat premature in your conclusions," retorted Mary, rather nettled by the familiarity.

"Perhaps; but whatever your views are I am no thought reader—I believe you were indirectly responsible for his bravery last night, at least I think so after your admission that you were engaged for that dance before the bomb arrived. His interest in you is more than platonic."

Mary uttered a nervous little laugh.

"I think you are too absurd, Lucy, but I will be most discreet—to use the hated word. I think he is a very interesting personality."

Lucy Mead shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes, dangerously so, Mary. Don't spoil his

life by reciprocating even his interest. As I see you are not convinced, let me tell you in confidence that already he has received an anonymous letter saying his days are numbered for daring to frustrate the will of the revolutionary party in India."

Mary shuddered, and as the car drew up she had to clasp the Mah Jong box very tightly in order to prevent herself from dropping it as she got out.

CHAPTER V

MARY AT NADIRPUR

The community in an Indian Cantonment may be divided into three distinct categories : First the Sahib Log, composed of Army Officers, Government officials of the superior grades, Railway, Canal and Postal Officers with a few indeterminables ; secondly, the *Katcha** Sahib Log—to borrow an apt Indian term—comprising subordinate British officials, British Warrant and N.C.O.'s, Railway subordinates, etc. ; and thirdly, the Indian element of traders, servants. The two former generally have their respective meeting grounds in the form of a club or institute.

Nadirpur was like any other station and was situated in the plains of India ; the only difference it could boast was perhaps its particularly long, fierce, hot weather. The garrison comprised a British Cavalry Regiment—The Red Hussars—a battery of Artillery, a British and two Indian Infantry Battalions together with the usual compliment of Army Service Corps and Doctors. The Infantry forming part of a Brigade of ever varying number in the Field Army to be, had at its head the erstwhile Brigadier-General, now Colonel, Meiklejohn, of uncertain years and activity, but replete with alphabetical distinctions mostly conferred on him by himself occupying a post of considerable security during the war.

A Commissioner—plain Mr. Day with no ribbons—a Judge, a Deputy Commissioner, Civil Surgeon, Police and Forest officers, proclaimed it the head-

* Katcha=Lit. unripe hence, imperfect, rough, etc.

quarters of a Civil Administrative area, whilst a goodly array of Railway officers marked it as a railroad centre of importance.

Of this social world the Commissioner and his wife were the recognised heads, the Brigade Commander, or rather his good lady, challenging the position as closely as she dared without actually infringing the printed priority list.

Major James Chapman was an impecunious, obscure field officer in one of the Indian Infantry Battalions—Rhode's Rifles. In his younger days he had had aspirations, but an early marriage with family and other encumbrances, not excluding a severe wound, had dissipated all ambition other than earning the maximum pension possible.

Mrs. Chapman, whilst admitting that her easy-going husband's case was past praying for, determined that Mary, the eldest of their three daughters, should marry early, but unlike her mother marry well, and do so before the family retired into that final, complete obscurity associated with a residence in the vicinity of Ealing.

Fortified by her convictions she had persuaded her husband, after a prolonged argument, to allow Mary to join them in India.

Like the majority of parents in India, the Chapmans were almost strangers to their children, particularly so with regard to their eldest daughter, who for various reasons had been left at home with relatives from a very early age.

Since her marriage Mrs. Chapman had endured many hardships and privations, and these had left their mark in the form of a cynical conversatism. She was quite out of touch with youthful aspirations in general, more especially with those great changes which had swept away many Victorian restrictions regarding the younger members of her own sex. Neither she nor her husband had seen their daughter since she was fourteen, and although they were

aware from school reports and letters from relatives that Mary had turned out a very attractive-looking young person, gifted with considerable intellectual attainments, they were not prepared for the very great surprise they experienced when she arrived. Her father, in his good-natured indolent way accepted her beauty and talents as something beyond his comprehension, and was prepared to extend to her every indulgence. Mrs. Chapman, feeling highly flattered by Mary's appearance, at once raised the standard of what she considered a good match, indeed saw visions of her own social uplift ; but she committed the irreparable mistake of deriding her daughter's scholastic endowments, stigmatising them as priggish affectation.

Mary read her mother's thoughts like an open book, and determined that she would be the arbiter of her own destiny. Small wonder that between the two arose an antagonism which as time went on became only the more pronounced.

Major Chapman was on the platform at Nadirpur to welcome them.

" I've got to get back to camp to-night, Jane," he said, as they rattled along in a very ancient Ford, " so I can only see you to the bungalow where you will find Yussaf with dinner all ready."

" How provoking, Jim," replied his wife. " I wanted to have a talk with you : why on earth can't you stay the night ? Surely Colonel Aldridge can dispense with your presence for twenty-four hours seeing that he is always belittling your work."

Her husband smiled grimly.

" I am the very man these ambitious Commanding Officers must have about them, Jane : all the errors in to-morrow's tactical field-day are to be laid at my door. These exercises are all run on the principle of learning by one's mistakes ; unless James Chapman is present the pre-arranged mistakes are apt to be farcical : my mistakes are always real-

istic and afford wonderful scope for the Brigade Commander—he is to be present—to discourse on the doctrine of his infallibility.”

“Why, Dad,” broke in Mary, “they’ll never allow you to go on pension; you’ll become a Churchill whose brilliant indiscretions are an adornment to every Government.”

“Well that’s a consoling thought, little girl, but we’ll talk it over another time.”

The car pulled up under a creeper-covered portico where the faithful Yussaf assisted them to alight by the aid of a smoky hurricane lanthorn.

The bungalow was an old one which still bravely bore aloft its pre-mutiny thatch. From an English point of view it was not only delapidated but destitute of all ordinary amenities, but for those who like the Chapmans had usually to spend their hot weather in the plains, it possessed the great advantage of coolness.

Major Chapman saw them into the house, said goodnight, climbed back into the Ford, and disappeared.

How dismally dreary it all seems after Canauj thought Mary. Then she said aloud: “What shall we all do until the Garrison comes in next Saturday, Mother?”

“I should have thought, Mary, that you were the last person to be troubled by such a matter, I quite expected that your books and other intellectual pursuits would amply occupy you,” retorted Mrs. Chapman satirically. “Personally I shall do what most ordinary mortals do—lump it.”

“You seem to have spent a good deal of your life lumping it, Mother.”

Mrs. Chapman, seizing the opening, retorted: “I *have*, Mary,” then softening her tone, went on “that is why I want you, by making a sensible match, to avoid lumps; but let us get to dinner and to bed. I am very tired.”

The entire masculine element not in a military camp being on tour, the feminine sex dominated the club lawn, bridge tables, and tennis courts. Mary, having been in Nadirpur but a short three weeks before accompanying her mother to Canauj, had not had time to form many friendships, and consequently, as so often happens in such cases, felt insufferably bored by the small talk she heard around her. It was not that she disliked her sex—far from it—but she could not find anyone in Nadirpur who appealed to her. The few unmarried women, engrossed on avoiding spinsterhood, saw in her yet another rival. Repeated failures had in some subtle way forged a common if frequently strained link between the former, but Mary being a new-comer, had yet to graduate. She discovered however a consolation in the person of Lt. Ritchie, an officer of two years' service left behind by the Royal Lomaxshires in order to look after the Guards mounted on sundry Government Buildings. He was known, and usually addressed as Bobby by all and sundry ; even the men of his Platoon alluded to him—sometimes in his hearing—by the familiar name.

Under ordinary circumstances she would probably never have noticed him. He had not troubled to call on her mother and enjoyed a reputation for avoiding polite feminine society—especially the spinster part of it.

Stranded at the club the evening after her return to Nadirpur—being unable to obtain any form of conveyance—Bobby Ritchie, also about to go home, noticed her predicament, and came up to her.

"Can I be of any assistance, Miss Chapman ? I will take you along in my side-car provided you don't mind some birds and unmentionable damp garments."

"It is very good of you, Mr. Ritchie, but won't it take you out of your way ?"

"Out of my way, Miss Chapman! Nothing is ever out of my way except a tea fight."

Mary laughed. "Then I'll accept, Mr. Ritchie, thank you so much."

Bobby tried to tidy up the car in order to open the door.

"Please don't bother, Mr. Ritchie, I'll dump myself in somehow."

Bobby held her arm while she clambered in. She noticed that on the floor was a medley of birds, the wet shorts and boots of her Charioteer, also at her right side resting against the seat, a gun.

It was about a mile to the house, but they seemed to cover it in about one minute.

"Won't you come in, Mr. Ritchie? just to have a peg or something?"

"I don't think my garments are suitable, Miss Chapman: shorts and stockings in a drawing-room are taboo aren't they?"

"Indeed not," she replied, "Father often wears them."

"But I am not a father as yet, Miss Chapman. If, however, you will accept a couple of brace of snipe I'll bring them in, then fly."

Mary pushing aside the chicks, entered the drawing-room where Mrs. Chapman was reading.

"Mother, let me introduce Mr. Ritchie, who not only brought me home in his side-car, but wants to present us with some birds."

Mrs. Chapman acknowledged the introduction from her chair, critically scanning the freckled-faced, jolly-looking youngster before her. He stood about five-foot-ten, she noticed—the very picture of healthy athletic manliness.

Why had she not been granted a son like this instead of three tiresome daughters?"

"I must apologise, Mr. Chapman, for intruding so abruptly and in such clothes, but your daughter

insisted on my carrying in the birds, anyhow, having now delivered the goods I will be off."

Mrs. Chapman called to the butler.

"Take these birds, Yussaf, also bring the whisky and soda. Please sit down, Mr. Ritchie, you'll find the cigarettes in that box," pointing to it.

Bobby felt uncomfortable, and wondered if he ought to apologise for not having called. Mary divining what was passing through his mind solved the difficulty by turning towards her mother, saying:

"Mr. Ritchie must help us consume the birds, Mother, mustn't he? I expect in this warm weather they will be fit to eat to-morrow: come to dinner at eight."

"Yes, do come, Mr. Ritchie," added Mrs. Chapman conventionally; "we'd be so pleased to see you—just ourselves, and, of course, wear a dinner jacket."

Bobby feeling he was being bounced tried to think out a plausible excuse, but none being readily forthcoming, he accepted on the understanding that he could go early, as he had the Guards to turn out.

"We'll try to find another man to keep you company over the wine, Mr. Ritchie," remarked Mary.

"Oh, please don't, Miss Chapman; I'd be much happier with you by myself," then thinking he had said the wrong thing, added: "I hate dinner parties."

"All right then we'll leave it at that," agreed Mary laughing.

The peg having been finished, Bobby took his departure swearing inwardly he'd been had for a fool.

"A nice looking boy," suggested Mrs. Chapman, "but really, Mary, I think it was quite unnecessary to ask him in to dinner specially as I am sure he doesn't want to come; besides, you know, he has never called."

"It will do him good to dine, Mother: as to not having called, what does that matter? I rather like

the non-callers it shows their contempt for a foolish convention ; and besides, most of the men who are punctual about calling, or appear regularly at dances and dinners, in other words social successes, are often duds when it comes to doing anything else."

" I am quite sure you would not apply that slang word to Captain Greatorix, Mary."

" Well, perhaps not, Mother, but he is one of the exceptions which prove the rule."

" That may be, Mary, but I've heard it rumoured that Mr. Ritchie is reckless and wild—drinks quite a lot. Then I overheard the Brigade Commander telling your father about some entanglement with a second rate Railway girl ; if that is what you mean by other things, I don't approve of your views."

" Now, don't be absurd, Mother. Mr. Ritchie—everyone calls him Bobby—may be a bit wild, but I am sure he is too good a shot to drink ; as to the silly tittle-tattle about those Railway girls, why most young men at home go through that stage—a good thing too."

" Mary, I cannot listen to such shocking things. I suppose you picked them up in Paris."

" Not Paris, Mother, I can assure you. I was guarded like a leading lady in a Turkish harem there ; but in dear old London."

" That is quite enough, Mary," exclaimed Mrs. Chapman, as she rose and left the room.

Mrs. Chapman's presence at a dinner did not, as a rule, lend gaiety to the event, especially in the case of a tête-à-tête affair as arranged for Bobby's entertainment. Indeed, she was rather a wet blanket. Fortunately, Mary and her guest were not possessed of temperaments which are easily repressed. Both ignored Mrs. Chapman's chilling demeanour with the result that they were soon absorbed in exchanging views on life, and entirely monopolised the conversation.

Bobby's thinking horizon was generally restricted to his Regiment, sport in the form of small game shooting, fishing, footer with his beloved platoon, and an occasional game of squash or tennis. Mary knew very little about these pursuits, although she played lawn tennis well enough to talk its 'shop' with some intelligence ; yet when she led Bobby away from his particular line she found him quite a good conversationalist with very clearly expressed views on most matters, many of them being hardly complimentary towards her own, for example : he stigmatised what he termed *the brainy crowd* as a nuisance to humanity, being of opinion that all boys should be taught simple carpentering, accounts and typewriting, whilst girls should learn sewing—specially the use of a machine—cooking and house-keeping before they learnt classics, Algebra and such like.

" Why, you'd have the whole world peopled with materialistic imbeciles, Mr. Ritchie," she objected.

" I am not quite certain what a materialist is, Miss Chapman, but if it means power to earn a living, then I would plump for the imbeciles, because most of us have got to earn a living. What earthly use was it my learning Latin and Greek ? Not that I did learn much ; I only did enough to keep the stick or impots off me which is what ninety per cent do ; why even with that I wasted hundreds of hours."

" But it improves the mind, Mr. Ritchie ; that is the object of the academic side of education—character training being a different matter. Surely you do not advocate the abolition of everything that leads to scholarship."

" Not quite that, Miss Chapman. I daresay the classics do improve the mind if you learn enough of them really to understand what they are supposed to teach, but how many English school boys know enough of their own language to appreciate its beauties, so how on earth can they be expected to

comprehend the wonders of Greek and Latin ? You must know your own language before you can learn or appreciate another. Why even now I can hardly understand some of your super-clever English."

"That's because you don't try," put in Mary.

"Oh yes I do, and sometimes I have to try very hard when making up some of this educational stuff served out to the soldiers these days as necessary for their future welfare. It is just the same over mathematics : much better teach one about other countries and other people instead of a lot of tosh in symbols that is never used by ordinary mortals. Quite all right for cranks like Einstein although how his incomprehensible discoveries are going to help make the world a better place to live in is beyond me. As far as my miserable intelligence goes he merely tells us all that what we thought straight is crooked, and that isn't very helpful."

"Well, what sort of education do you want, Mr. Ritchie ?"

"Oh ! plain straight forward stuff like one's own language, History, Geography, Arithmetic, Drawing, Accounts, etc. Curiously enough education begins all right. You don't start teaching a kid to read and write his alphabet by commencing with the Greek character ; but for some inexplicable reason when he is about to enter his teens he is started off at learning a lot of useless stuff. Then, when almost grown up he reverts to the sensible again. My idea is that it should be all sensible unless one has not got to earn a living or intend earning a living by teaching those who won't have to, when one can start acquiring the classical embellishment stunts. I have often wondered what was taught in pre-Grecian days, to say, cultured Egyptians."

"I consider a classical education of some sort essential for a cultured gentleman," Mrs. Chapman suddenly broke in with emphasis.

"Well, what about girls, Mrs. Chapman ; can't

they be cultured ladies without a classical education ? ” replied Bobby quizzically. “ But I am only a barbarian, so can’t tackle the subject. All I feel is one cannot learn anything until one knows one’s own language first, not even mathematics. It is because we are not taught our own tongue properly that we experience difficulty in understanding most of the other things they try to teach us.”

“ When did you discover all this, Mr. Ritchie ? ” inquired Mary, getting quite interested.

“ When I tried to teach the ordinary private soldier. He isn’t a bit stupid I know, but he simply does not understand what he reads—words and sentences convey little to him : he is just like what I was at fourteen, or probably what I am still like.”

“ Well, you can’t accuse him of having wasted his time on acquiring useless knowledge, Mr. Ritchie. The Council Schools don’t go in for what you call embellishment stunts.”

“ No ; but the Council Schools hopelessly neglect the teaching of any English just as the public schools do ; if you exclude a certain refinement of accent—which after all is not very important—the average public school boy of twenty finds it just as hard to express himself intelligently as the private soldier of the same age. After all, Miss Chapman, you must concede that the business of absorbing or imparting ideas, depends on knowledge of language written or verbal ; if that knowledge is defective, the ideas are neither absorbed nor imparted. I merely maintain that until a boy knows a good deal about his own tongue it is waste of time teaching him a lot of other stuff he does not understand. But I am getting out of my depth, in fact, have been ever since you drew me into these deep waters, so let’s change the subject by getting back to something that does not display my ignorance. Do you take any interest in fishing ? ”

"Not particularly, Mr. Ritchie, but anyway, I like listening to you displaying your ignorance as you call it, or anyhow prefer that to displaying my own, but I daresay your views on fishing are just as interesting—most of your killing industries lend themselves to pleasant commentary."

"If you two are going to talk about fishing," declared Mrs. Chapman, "I intend returning to my book in the drawing-room."

"All right, Mother, we'll finish in the verandah, so that Yussaf can clear away after he has brought the coffee."

"Yes, Miss Chapman, I add to my crimes that of killing fish chiefly because I love the glorious river. I suppose you have not been on it yet?"

"No, nor even seen it although father often fishes there."

"Yes, I have met Major Chapman several times. I have a sailing boat of sorts near the ferry: why not pay the old Bina a visit?"

Mary put her finger to her lips—"S'sh, Mr. Ritchie! I would like to come very much, but if I went with you, what about the chaperon?"

Bobby laughed. "Oh Heavens! Surely, we can dispense with that encumbrance," he urged. "You know no one takes me seriously, Miss Chapman; my tender age disarms suspicion; why, when I am accepted in feminine society, which isn't very often, I am taken on trust as a sort of irresponsible schoolboy brother. You let me ask your mother. I will put it to her so that she can't refuse."

"You can try, but don't blame me if you meet with a rebuff, and as it is getting chilly you can try now."

Bobby seated himself beside Mary's mother, who had put down her book as they both entered.

"Mrs. Chapman, will you allow me to show your daughter the river to-morrow afternoon; once the troops return, I shall probably not have an oppor-

tunity to do so. It's only eight miles, so we can be back in time for tea."

Mrs. Chapman, taken unawares, was somewhat perplexed, but Bobby Ritchie's ingenious frankness and boyish manner overcame her scruples. After all what harm could there be in letting Mary go to the river with this youngster, besides his expressed contempt for intellectuals might act as an antidote to some of Mary's absurd ideas.

"Well, Mr. Ritchie, I don't approve of these expeditions, but if you promise to take great care of Mary you can take her as far as the Ferry."

"That's all right, Mrs. Chapman, but you know it's a case of Miss Chapman taking care of me," explained Bobby eagerly, his face as solemn as that of a judge. "I'd ask you too, only there isn't room in the Rolls," he added naively.

Mary gasped. The audacity of the onslaught. "Really, Mr. Ritchie, I think we'd better hire a car," she interposed.

"You won't get one, Miss Chapman; they are all out with the troops; I'd thought of that."

"Oh, the young liar!" said Mary to herself.

Bobby continued to engage Mrs. Chapman in conversation about his own various petty affairs; eventually when he said goodnight, he had firmly established himself in her good graces as a charming young man—and so sensible.

"What about those Guards? Mr. Ritchie," said Mary, as he started to get the 'Rolls' ready.

"Oh, bother the beastly thing, I'd forgotten all about them."

Mary smiled to herself as she lay in bed comparing Pertab Singh's elaborate arrangements for securing a meeting with this boy's frankness—surely typical of both nationalities.

CHAPTER VI

A BOATING ADVENTURE

Punctually at 2.30 the next day Bobby presented himself at the door with his conveyance. A well-stocked tea-basket concealed under a rug having been hastily thrust into the side-car, they set off.

A few minutes sufficed to clear the cantonments. The road which was good led across an undulating plain covered with stunted bushes and great boulders, while in the distance small jagged-looking rocky hills standing five to six hundred feet above the general level, gave a saw-like appearance to the horizon : the entire landscape presented a rugged, inhospitable, monotonous appearance.

"Rather trying to the eyes and not quite like Sussex," remarked Bobby.

"How did you know I came from Sussex?" inquired Mary.

"I didn't know; any other dear old English county would have answered as well; Sussex was a random shot, but I suppose now you do come from round those parts. It's awful here in the hot weather, just a shimmering furnace; but the river, it's a gem; I often buzz out for a swim; there it is in front of us."

Mary looked. The road had begun to dip. Before her and to the right and left, could be seen glimpses of blue: then, as they drew nearer, the whole river line burst into view.

"What a lovely sight!" exclaimed Mary. "I thought I'd see a muddy trickle like the river at Canauj which is supposed to be one of India's mighty streams."

" Oh, the Gunga : yes, it's always muddy, a murky trickle from want of water, or a flood of lentil soup. But the one in front is a totally different proposition, as the Yankees say ; it's some river, half a mile broad, generally as clear as crystal with sandbanks, islands, and bays, also ten feet of water : of course in the rains its tint gets a bit disturbed. However, here we are at the Ferry, so let's get out."

As the bike stopped a couple of coolies appeared who helped to unload.

" Now to the yacht," said Bobby, as he led the way along a winding footpath under the high banks to a little inlet where, moored to a post, was a saucer-like affair with a mast.

" I thought we were only going to look at the river, Mr. Ritchie."

" So we are, but from the good ship ' Anne ' ; I made no conditions with your mother as to the point from which we'd view it," retorted Bobby. " Can you handle the tiller, Miss Chapman, while I hoist the sail ? "

" No, I can't. I've never done more than steer a river pleasure-boat, and I steer it pretty badly at that."

" Well, never mind, just hang on to it, so as to keep her nose down stream a minute."

There was a good breeze, so that as soon as the sail was set, the little craft heeled over, and quickly drew out into mid-stream. Bobby took the tiller.

" Now, Miss Chapman, we'll make for a shady inlet I know of. After tea, I will instruct you in the art of becoming the complete sailor."

They were soon moored under a large tree, and then the contents of the tea-basket were tackled.

" You never imagined a place like this, so close to Nadirpur, did you ? Yet hardly anyone ever comes here."

" No, I'd never have suspected its existence, Mr. Ritchie. Everyone is too wrapped up in polo,

tennis, tea-fights, and dancing, to give it a thought, I suppose."

"Yes, that's it. When you have picked up a bit of sea sense you must come here again to be initiated into the art of killing fish."

"Oh, but I'd much rather sail about. I'd hate killing things, besides I haven't the patience to dangle a line in the water."

"Wait till you've tried, Miss Chapman; you'll soon drop your *conchy* scruples: why I heard that nothing could hold you back from being at a kill with the Canauj Hunt."

"You are quite right, Mr. Ritchie, nothing could hold my horse, so I became an unwilling witness of the kill. I felt quite sick when I saw the poor Jack dragged down and torn to pieces."

Bobby laughed. "You eat all kinds of things which have to suffer the death penalty—often painful: why we'd all starve if you had your way."

"Well, I wish I was a vegetarian: those people you call Jains have my sympathy in their belief that it is wrong to kill any living thing."

"But what do you call a living thing, Miss Chapman? The use of disinfectants causes the death of millions of living organisms. You don't mean to tell me you'd object to the destruction of cholera germs, or to take something more immediately personal, millions of malaria ones by dosing yourself with quinine. I don't see where one is to draw the line. Even a vegetarian diet may cause untold misery for all we know."

"Perhaps it's a foolish impracticable idea, but I do hate seeing things killed. I suppose it is a case of what the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve for. I remember when I was quite a little girl I was struck with what a young officer in the Army said when he was dining with us on leave from the front. He remarked that he'd prefer to be in a naval engagement, as nowadays, it was less personal because

one rarely had to look in the face of the man you intended to kill or had killed. I feel rather like that where sport is concerned : however, let's get out on the river : you can then give me my first lesson in sailing."

Mary took the tiller and Bobby sat down beside her and gave directions. It certainly seemed quite easy. They tacked, went about, ran before the wind, in fact, went through all the simpler evolutions. The lapping of the water against the sides, the bits of spray that came over when beating to windward, caused a delightful sense of exhilaration.

"Now put her away before the wind, Miss Chapman, while I go forward to tighten that loose rope."

Mary did as directed and Bobby bending down began to fiddle with the loose stay.

Suddenly, without any warning, a strong gust came from an unexpected quarter and struck the boat ; the boom went over with a terrific jerk to the side where Bobby was working, and striking him on the head knocked him overboard.

Fortunately the boat had very little weigh on, and something snapping, the sail came down leaving her almost stationary.

Mary, beside herself with terror, looked over the side and saw Bobby trailing head down in the water, his foot evidently entangled in some part of the gear. She had presence of mind enough to recognise that only instant action would save him from drowning, so seizing a boat hook lying handy she reached out with it and catching part of his shirt, drew him to the side of the boat and got his head above water.

The problem was how to get him out of the water, and into the boat. She knew that her unaided strength was useless ; but her quick intellect came to her help. There was plenty of rope within reach, so, supporting Bobby's head with one hand, she worked one of the rope ends under his arm-pits,

making a loop, she then hauled on it till his head and chest were as high as the gunwhale where she fastened off the rope. She noticed he had a cut on his head, but was breathing. Next, leaving his head end, she passed another rope round his thighs, thus being able to pull the rest of his body up.

What with Bobby's weight and that of her own, the water was almost over the side ; if she could but turn the body over slightly, it would of itself roll into the boat.

Again the boat-hook came in useful, for by getting it fast in one of the pockets of his shorts, she was able to pull the body over enough to get it on board.

Mary knew nothing about first aid, but managed to manœuvre Bobby into a prone position in the bottom of the boat on one of the rugs.

Now what was to be done ? They were not only two or three miles from where they had started, but were slowly drifting down stream. No sign of a village or habitation was to be seen. There were a pair of oars but no rowlocks.

Mary examined her *case* carefully. The breathing was good, so she came to the conclusion that he was more stunned than drowned. The question was how much stunned ?

It was getting chilly. Should he be left in his soaking garments ? She felt in a dilemma. To undress a young man shocked her sense of propriety ; on the other hand, to let him add a severe cold to his present misfortune merely because of some idiotic sex conventions appeared to her outrageous. If she could but remove his wet clothes at once they would soon dry in the strong breeze.

She decided to get them off—an easy matter, as they only comprised a pair of shorts and a cotton shirt. Having wrung them out she hung them up to dry, then, spreading the remaining rug over him she sat down to await events. She was not kept long in suspense. Sundry movements beneath the

rug showed her that the patient was regaining consciousness.

Suddenly Bobby sitting up, stared about him in a wild manner till his eyes rested on Mary, he then sank back again without saying anything.

Mary felt embarrassed. A nude, unconscious young man was bad enough, but a conscious one was much worse.

Again Bobby sat up. This time he seemed to recognise his position and to have found his voice.

"What on earth has happened ; where are my clothes ?"

"You've had an accident, Mr. Ritchie ; better lie quiet for a bit : your clothes will soon be dry, when they are I will give them to you."

Bobby lapsed into silence. The situation was beyond his grasp for the moment. Here he was lying unclothed in a boat with a girl he hardly knew who must have pulled him out of the water—he had a hazy recollection of falling somewhere—and then undressed him.

An unbroken silence followed until getting desperate, Bobby said, "Look here, Miss Chapman, wet or dry I must have my clothes, if only to get us both out of this mess as quickly as possible."

Mary handed the garments. They were almost dry—anyhow wearable. So she threw them to him.

Bobby scrambled into them beneath the rug, a performance which caused much merriment to Mary. He then tried to get on to his feet, but a sudden giddiness accentuated by the instability of a small craft like the 'Anne,' caused him to sit down abruptly.

"Better wait a bit, Mr. Ritchie. Half an hour or so won't make or mar my reputation—'in for a shilling in for a pound.' If we can't get up sail I don't see how we are to get home for some time—for oars aren't much use without the row-locks."

Bobby examined the gear and found that the only

damage was a broken halliard which could easily be put right ; so while he waited for his legs to regain their normal strength, he made things right for hoisting the sail. He got it up at last, then managing to scramble to the tiller, put the boat on its course for home. They had not drifted far as the fresh evening breeze blowing up stream had almost counteracted the sluggish current ; but it was dark when they reached the moorings.

"We must arrange a joint fib to account for our lateness."

"Well, your cut head caused by an accident on the road—say a burst tyre—ought to do the needful" replied 'Eve.'

"Yes, I suppose that yarn will fit the circumstances, Miss Chapman. But before we push off I've got to thank you for saving my life : I don't know exactly what occurred, but I presume the bally boat did a heavy jibe, and that the boom came over unexpectedly, and not only bumped my head, but heeled the little craft over such a lot that I toppled into the water."

Mary nodded assent, and Bobby continued. "Somehow or other you fished me out, although how, I can't imagine, but if you had not got me on board pretty quickly I'd have gone west."

"Well, Mr. Ritchie, you see it was my carelessness caused the disaster, although I still don't know what made the sail behave as it did. Fortunately you did not part company with the boat completely, as one of your feet got caught up in the ropes. I either had to get you on board again or drift down stream all night with a corpse in tow. Someday I will tell you how I got you on board again and all the rest—when I know you better—" she added mischievously. "That tear in your shirt and another in your pocket may give you the clue, but you *were* heavy. Now, let's get along home and say nothing more about it."

They found Mrs. Chapman out, so both were spared any cross-examination.

"If we stick to our little fable no one will be any the wiser, Miss Chapman ; but, really, I'd like to let everyone know how you played up in a pretty awkward position."

"If you utter a syllable of the truth, Mr. Ritchie, you will never hear the rest of the story, as I shall wash my hands of you."

They parted with a conventional handshake and good-night.

For the first time in his life Bobby Ritchie felt an interest in a girl, and he felt that it was neither salacious nor yet merely platonic, but something beyond the power of explanation.

To Mary the episode was an interesting, if somewhat embarrassing experience. She was glad she'd proved to herself that in one great emergency, commonsense had triumphed over hysteria and silly conventions ; and that she had made good.

CHAPTER VII

HAROLD LAWRENCE

With the return of garrison Nadirpur resumed its normal existence—dinners, dances, and sporting events of various kinds.

At first, Mary was interested by the ever-changing panorama of persons and scenes, but by degrees it began to pall—the shallowness of the life irritated her. With rare exceptions she hardly ever heard discussed any of the great public questions which loomed so large in the old country ; if mentioned at all they were dismissed with a jest. The entire community were complete hedonists, obsessed with a mania for organising some new entertainment : everything was run by a Committee or sub-Committee, the personal touch being completely absent.

The majority of the married people seemed to be living on an attenuated credit, or anyhow beyond their means. The money that should have been spent in making the bungalow comfortable and providing nourishing food, was squandered at the club—a mere entertainment bureau—or on boring dinner parties.

The petty squabbles and jealousies, existing between the various cliques, formed an all important item in the conversation.

These cliques were a source of infinite wonder to Mary. Practically speaking, those who were members of the Club were of similar social position ; actually there was a cleavage which would have provided a Thackeray with unlimited *copy*.

There was the military set acutely divided into those whose professions and pastimes were associated

with horses and those who went on foot. Then the civilian group dissected itself into Government and Railway officials. Each had its own particular pretensions, which, in turn, earned for the claimants some opprobrious, if at times, whimsical nickname, for example: The Red Hussars for their comparative wealth—war profiteers. The Royal Lomaxshires, for their aristocratic claims—the Snobshires. The Indian Infantry for their *guardian of India* bearing—The Black Watch. The Government officials' Intellectuality, Wooden Spoon. The Railway men's insistence as world workers, sleepers.

The Cavalry were sparing of their calls on the Infantry, particularly the Indian. The Military faction, as a whole, were not overwhelmingly affable towards the minor Government and Railway officials.

The Chapmans enjoyed a considerable degree of popularity with every section of the community. The mere fact that Jim Chapman did not aspire to high preferment ensured the goodwill of his military contemporaries—he was not a competitor. His innate kindness, sense of humour, and sportsmanship endeared him to all, notwithstanding his wife's chilling influence. Their hospitality was limited to a few dinners for those who could not be treated to any less formal entertainment and weekly tennis parties for the rest.

Consideration for Mary's future caused a slight increase in the number of dinner parties, Mrs. Chapman being of opinion that they afforded a more suitable medium for the presentation of her daughter's charm. Mary thought otherwise, but submitted cheerfully to the ordeal, mainly to please her father who really enjoyed them. He had arrived at an age where a comfortable evening meal, followed by a rubber or two at Bridge, afforded more congenial recreation than garden party lawn tennis, especially as the dinner parties arranged by Mrs.

Chapman were essentially masculine in their composition.

It was at one of these dinners that Mary made the acquaintance of Mr. Lawrence, the newly arrived, very young, acting Deputy Commissioner, with a reputation for doing things and generally *running* his Chief—the Commissioner.

Harold Lawrence, in spite of his name, did not come from a family that had served India for generations. He was a true product of the open competitive examination. His father was a small East County rural postmaster, whose strong but narrow socialistic views had not deterred him from consistent and persistent efforts to further Harold's prospects.

Securing every scholarship he could win young Lawrence passed from Council School through the prescribed channel to Oxford, where he entered Balliol as a marked man. Intellectually his ascendancy was accepted, but he also soon demonstrated his powers as an athlete by winning his Soccer blue in an incredibly short space of time.

His dialectic powers at the Union suggested a career at the home Bar ; but apprehensive that humble origin and relatives—he had several brothers and sisters—might embarrass him, he decided to enter the Indian Civil Service, and thus put six thousand miles between himself and his early associations.

The only person in Nadirpur who knew of his origin was Captain Greatorix, whose home received its letters from the Lawrence post-office.

Both men had known one another intimately since boyhood, when their respective parents had not been widely separated in social circumstances. Captain Greatorix's father had amassed a considerable fortune in the War, and he had raised himself from the position of a small country timber-merchant to that of a financial magnate.

Fate threw these two men who had played, poached, bathed together into one another's arms at Nadirpur. Both tacitly agreed not to divulge their past relationship, and except that people wondered what the smart Hussar officer had in common with the intellectual *heaven-born*—their familiarity could not be concealed—no one in Nadirpur knew much about either.

These little dinner parties being quite informal, and, as already mentioned, masculine in their composition, the conversation often turned to subjects which tended to monopolise the attention of the men: indeed Mrs. Chapman generally arranged the table with the object of facilitating what she was pleased to term *manly talk*, thus absolving her from the disagreeable incubus of making conversation.

Mary found herself seated next to Lawrence, and a few minutes conversation sufficed to establish an interesting exchange of ideas, until, during a momentary lull, he was drawn into a discussion which was in progress between Colonel Aldridge and the local Railway Manager on the subject of Trade Unions and restricted output—a strike on the Railway being then imminent.

Colonel Aldridge, in denouncing the entire union system, attributed their creation, and the ca-canny spirit to reprehensible ideas inculcated by the Council Schools: he held, further, that Indian labour agitators, being barren of any notions of their own, merely imitated the procedure prevailing at home. It was at this point that Lawrence entered the controversy by inquiring from Colonel Aldridge on what grounds he based his assertions that the Council Schools inculcated the ca-canny spirit.

"Speaking as one who had personal experience of a State education," Lawrence said, "I am afraid I don't agree with you, Colonel, and my one year's experience of a public school convinced me that if anything, the latter institutions are more productive

of the ideas you denounce than certain types of Trade Union literature. The whole attitude of the public school spirit towards learning, in contradistinction of that of sport, is one of restricted output and the ca-canny principle. A Union may limit the output of its members, but the public school *Union* is equally tyrannical towards the *swot*. Those of mediocre attainments with a strong bump for idleness, being in the majority, naturally try to put some curb on the output of those who are prepared to work or *swot*. This sentiment pervades all classes : incidentally, no such spirit pervades the state schools. Again, take sport. Neither Trade Unionism nor the public school spirit places any ban on its adherents doing the utmost to surpass one another in games of skill or chance, although it often happens that considerable advantages both monetary and otherwise are associated with success in sport.

" You see the same ideas prevailing during peace amongst young Army officers—the majority hail from the public schools—especially at the military educational establishments where talent and industry have to be suitably camouflaged if not to cause downright offence. Curiously enough, war being accorded a sporting cachet not only entitles the participants to demonstrate their talents, but demands of everyone his utmost. It is this attitude towards work and play in all classes which marks the fundamental difference between the British race and all others—not excluding the American. What do you think, Miss Chapman ? " he added, turning towards Mary.

" I am inclined to agree with you, but I am not supposed to express an opinion on such subjects, specially at a dinner-table—on the public schools principle I expect—" replied Mary in a bantering tone. " We should be seen but not heard you know ; and the only consolation for us is that of the small

maiden who when rebuked by a stern parent for her loquacity retorted that she supposed that old people should be heard because they were too ugly to look at."

Here Colonel Aldridge intervened by demanding from Lawrence his grounds for accusing the Army of restricted output, insinuating that Lawrence's knowledge of military affairs was likely to be just as vague as his (Colonel Aldridge's) concerning board schools, winding up with the observation that if Lawrence approved of restricted output and the canny principle he was a remarkably poor exponent of both. "You're all out to climb on and over any one you can," almost shouted the Colonel.

For a moment Harold Lawrence's eyes glittered. Then suavely he replied :

"You see, Colonel, I was at a State school, you were not, also for some considerable time I have been brought into close contact with the Army in the various Cantonments where I have served ; consequently, having had to listen to the everyday conversation of officers, my views are based on what I have heard : perhaps I am mistaken, but even if I am, it does not affect my contention that no particular class is free from the taint of restricted output and the canny principle. I can only say that both prevent a good deal of sweated labour and acting as a sort of incipient strike form a factor in collective bargaining, which, in turn, yields more tangible results than individual effort : Indians, in imitating our conduct, are doing so because we have foisted on them a political and industrial creed which is alien to all their instincts."

"Yes, and politically they are prepared to cut off our heads in order to endure a greater tyranny," put in Major Chapman ; "why, it's only the other day I met a chap with a big reputation in the military world—I won't tell you what his name was—who told me he had all his plans laid for attempting

the seizure of the reins of Government, so soon as collective bargaining by Indian politicians had sufficiently undermined the all-British supremacy still upheld by the Viceroy by virtue of his power of certification. He told me that no appeals to sloppy sentiment would deter him from the attempt as the prize was worth the risk. What do you think of that, Lawrence? And do you consider that India's political future would be advanced by risking such a catastrophe?"

"Well, to begin, Chapman, your question switches the conversation from industry to politics. I don't suppose your acquaintance is the only filibuster: I know of fellows in my service and also certain Indian Princes who cherish similar projects. If matters ever came to such a pass, which I doubt, you'd certainly see the present benevolent autocracy supplemented by a malevolent autopsy, which, as you say, would not advance India's welfare; but, still, I maintain that we can well afford to let Indians manage their own affairs more than they do, without incurring such a risk."

"But how?" scornfully queried Colonel Aldridge. "Do you seriously consider, Lawrence, that Indians can manage their own affairs?"

"Most certainly I do, but not by means of a suffrage either limited or unlimited—they already do so in the Indian States. To give effect to my views, which, by the way, were held by a distinguished namesake, I would re-divide British India into autonomous States by creating new ones, reviving old ones, and extending existing ones. We would, anyhow for some time to come, keep the Presidency Capitals, Railways, and Postal Services, under our direct administration, also the Army, which would be paid for by levying tribute from the States as of old. Each State would manage its own affairs as it liked subject to certain limitations, the whole forming a Federation under British guidance

and protection. That, in my opinion, is the only form of Home Rule India can ever make a success, anyhow for some time to come."

"Pretty reactionary, Lawrence," declared Colonel Aldridge, "and not at all what I expected from a protagonist of Trade Unions, Strikes, and what not. You know better than most, having been in the political service, that the existing States are a hotbed of iniquitous administration."

"Yes, some are," admitted Lawrence. "But, nevertheless, the people seem to appreciate their Government; therefore, although a radical in many of my views, I am prepared to let them have what they like, because I consider that what they like is better for them than nostrums prescribed by aliens. The question of whether the system of Government is by, or of, the people, is of secondary importance. Further, in creating new States, it would be a simple matter to introduce constitutional monarchy or even try the experiment of a President, where circumstances pointed that way."

"Admitting for argument's sake that the people in the Native States do not disapprove of their Governments, Lawrence, do you consider that the people in British India would tolerate being placed under a reactionary type of Government such as you contemplate?" asked the Railwayman who had dropped out of the discussion and been chatting to Mrs. Chapman. "And what about those areas where you have a British planting community?"

"I believe the former would prefer the British administration as it existed before the reforms, but failing that, they would rather have a Maharajah's administration, such as exists in one of the South Indian States, to any based on a suffrage. The majority don't want to be bothered with a vote. They view with suspicion anyone who owes his authority to a vote, believing, as they do, that corruption rules the roost. As to the planter commu-

nity—they'd rub along quite as well in a State such as I contemplate as in British India under present conditions. It's not so long ago that the planters in a certain British area, exasperated by agitators, threatened to place their local Government under restraint—direct action of a most pronounced type. Further, the powers that be were much exercised as to whether, in the event of the planters putting their threat into force, white troops could be trusted to coerce them. Such a state of affairs would be unlikely to arise in a Maharajah-ruled State, as whatever may be the defects of such an administration, toleration of seditious agitation or threats of direct action, is not one of its failings. I believe the planters were also uncertain of their own attitude towards British bayonets. Anyhow, they became more constitutional in their views, which proves that a well-disciplined white force in India is essential in order to keep in check unruly white elements—like your friend Chapman—quite as much as to maintain the law in other quarters. Curiously enough, many intelligent Indians, and home politicians fail to recognise this point."

"You don't, then, approve of educating the masses to appreciate a Government based on a suffrage," urged the Railway man.

"No, I certainly do not," replied Lawrence. "If they want a suffrage they will, as in England, acquire the taste for it without any education. The demand for parliamentary Government in England arose without any organised propaganda on its behalf. The people came to the conclusion they wanted it, and they had it. People were not despatched into the highways and byways to preach the advantages of a suffrage, and no newspapers existed. I consider the pathetic indifference—to use the expression of one of our Paget M.P.'s—of the masses towards enfranchisement is a sign that they are contented with the form of Government they

have, and I fail to see any reason for disturbing that indifference further."

"The fact is, Lawrence, you are an unmitigated reactionary," remarked Major Chapman, "and you attempt to conceal it under specious sentences."

"I can't see that because I advocate Indians managing their own affairs in a manner sanctioned by centuries of custom and their religion, that I am therefore a reactionary, Chapman," retorted Lawrence. "Efficient Government from an Englishman's point of view is Whitehall Government with its hordes of highly paid functionaries who compile statistics about anything and everything. A country can get on quite well without efficient Government, particularly Oriental ones. The Whitehall system suits Englishmen; it does not suit Indians who would be quite content with a much simpler one."

"But," interposed Colonel Aldridge, "it's only a few days since I heard you denounce hereditary titles and a privileged class, and yet now you propose creating hereditary rulers who would certainly form a privileged class."

"Yes, I am opposed to the hereditary principle, Colonel, but the only alternative to a confederation of States, ruled by Constitutional Maharajahs or Rajahs is a confederation of States ruled by Presidents, and Presidents require an intelligent suffrage, which, I maintain, is not only unattainable in India, but unpopular. Therefore, once again I would give way to what our American cousins call the King business. Experience has shown us that such a business is best conducted on the hereditary principle, tempered by selection; otherwise one would have to endure the highly undesirable conditions which prevailed in Rome under its Emperors. You must also remember that in India the hereditary principle is subject to many vicissitudes which virtually reduce it to a process of selection. As to

the question of privileged classes, every country, every system of government throws them up—Russian bureaucrats, American millionaires. If you mean an effete and parasitic nobility, then India, in proportion to her huge population, is singularly fortunate—her privileged classes are chiefly to be found amongst the priesthood, which no form of Government will alter.”

“What significance do you attach to the recent bomb outrage at Canauj, Lawrence,” asked the Railway man. “It seems to me that a country which produces that type of outrage—and it’s one of many—is not likely to submit, for long, to government by Maharajahs or priests.”

“I attach no particular significance to the occurrence,” said Lawrence. “Every country has to put up with similar episodes—England has had its Guy Fawkes. This much can be said ; concealment of the perpetrators of a crime like that would be a rare event in an Indian State, as the Government would take steps to discover the criminals in a way no British administration would stoop to. The fact that an Indian, by an act of singular courage, saved the situation will appeal to all that is the best in Indians, and will go a long way to remove the sting : by the way, Mrs. Chapman, you and your daughter were right in the thick of it, weren’t you ? ”

“Yes, Mr. Lawrence. The bomb fell almost at our feet. But I prefer not to allude to it, please.” Saying which, she rose and accompanied by Mary, withdrew, remarking to her husband :

“Don’t sit over the wine too long, Jim. I’ll have the bridge table set out ready for you in ten minutes.”

“We’ll follow you, Jane, as soon as we’ve finished the coffee and got our cigars alight.”

In the drawing-room Mrs. Chapman asked Mary what she thought of Lawrence, adding, “I think he is an interesting personality, but, of course, full of

strange ideas, due, I suppose, to his peculiar upbringing. You certainly cannot accuse me of sending you into dinner with a boring school boy, can you? You seemed to hit it off together, too."

"I don't quite know what you mean by *hitting it off*, Mother, I hardly got in a word edgeways once he joined in that discussion about strikes and what not. I am not sure whether I like him or not; he is inclined to be egotistical, also a wee bit provocative. I should think he will either rise high, or, on account of his outspoken opinions, will not be entrusted with important posts."

On the departure of his wife and daughter, Major Chapman led the conversation back to the original channel by asking Lawrence what he thought of Indianization of the Army.

"It is bound to come," the latter replied. "We cannot always remain in India, and it is up to us when we have to quit, to leave India able to defend herself, and thus preserve her from Britain's fate on the departure of the Romans."

"Very laudable, Lawrence," declared Colonel Aldridge, "but I don't see how you are to carry out the project, particularly in your 'back to the States' scheme."

"I have not given the matter much thought, Colonel. But assuming that my ideas were acceptable, I have no doubt that in course of time the Council of Princes, which would virtually be a Federal Government, could be educated to the conception of a federal force, contributed to by all the States on a *pro rata* basis."

"I don't believe that would be feasible, Lawrence," said Colonel Aldridge. "And it is my firm belief that whatever provision we made, our departure from India would, to use your own phrase, become the signal for a general autopsy."

"Perhaps, but that is no reason for not attempting to prevent or mitigate such a disaster," replied

Lawrence. "By abolishing the present British administered areas we would get rid of many local administrative troubles. As I have already said, we'd retain, for the present, the direct control of the Railways, Postal and Military Services. The two former are already Indianized to a great extent. There would remain but the Army—a difficult problem—but the Indian Medical Service which is, after all, a military one, has been largely Indianized and the results are not particularly disappointing from a professional point of view. Personally, I would rather be treated by a competent or incompetent Indian Doctor than by an incompetent Englishman."

"You forget, Lawrence," urged Major Chapman, "that in one important respect the fighting branch differs fundamentally from the other Indianized bodies you have mentioned, and that is in regard to the power conferred on officers to order a junior to an almost certain death. An Englishman will cheerfully obey such an order from his countrymen, but will never do so from an Indian."

"Why not?" inquired Lawrence. "Many thousands of Indians went cheerfully to their death in the Great War at the bidding of Englishmen, for a cause they hardly understood: I think your assumption does discredit to your compatriots."

"If you really think that, Lawrence," almost sneered Colonel Aldridge, "you must be one of those rare persons who rise superior to ordinary mortals, because right or wrong, the majority of Englishmen would never accept your views: further, few Indians with fighting instincts would agree with you. In Mesopotamia when Indian units had not only lost all their British officers, but were mixed up with white troops also without officers, the Indian Non-Commissioned Officers and sepoy actually asked British privates to take command. The reason we are in India is because we are racially

the superior of Indians. It is all cant and humbug pretending that we are not. I go so far as to maintain that in the case where a Regiment on service was commanded by an Indian with British officers under him, then no matter how junior the latter, one of them would be compelled by the Indian personnel to take command."

"You may be right, Colonel, but don't you think we can, in time, educate Indians to become military leaders? Don't you think that the mere fact of giving Indians King's Commissions will, by a subtle process of induction, create loyalty? Look at the old Irish Regiments, the personnel of which was composed of men who in their own homes and districts were openly disloyal to England, yet were loyal to their salt when enlisted as soldiers. In fact, I have known Irish officers whose sentiments were distinctly hostile to English domination, yet brave soldiers of the Empire."

Colonel Aldridge made a gesture of impatience, but Lawrence continued :

"To my mind the bringing of men together into Regiments has an anti-seditious effect. Apart from any reasons of national sentiment, King's commissioned Indian officers, as they advance in rank will support the British power rather than subvert it because they will know that its extinction would mean their extinction. I think many of my countrymen take a very narrow view about this process of Indianization, not merely from a military aspect but as regards all public service."

"I don't agree with you," broke in Colonel Aldridge. "As you put it a little while ago when on the subject of the suffrage; I can see no reason to educate them as military leaders even if they are capable of learning. We have just as much right to dominate Indians as Indians have to dominate the aboriginal tribes. I do not believe that the giving of commissions would inculcate a sense of loyalty.

In the mutiny our deadliest enemies were the Indian officers."

"Ah!" interrupted Lawrence, "that was because we expected responsibility but withheld authority—exactly what we are doing now."

"Let me finish what I wish to say, Lawrence. There is a deal of difference between fighting troops and other branches of the public service. The unmarried officers live in a mess. Immediately you introduce an Indian you introduce an atmosphere of uncongenial reserve. Why? Because the other officers instinctively limit the range of their conversation in case anything might be said which would cause offence. Such a state of affairs does not tend towards amicable relations. The existing system of Indianization will sooner or later break down as the present generation of young officers grows older."

"Don't you think," suggested the Railwayman, "that this Indianization is already curtailing the supply of candidates for the Indian Army?"

"Undoubtedly," concurred Colonel Aldridge, looking towards Major Chapman for confirmation; "it is the dislike—I might almost say dread—of knowing that before long our boys will be commanded by Indians which makes so many of us shy off an Indian career for our sons, be it Civil or Military."

"Indianization doesn't alarm me nearly as much as the liability to premature pension," put in Major Chapman. "When all is said and done it is the retired Lt.-Colonels and Majors who form the bulk, and it is their children who see and feel the acute discomfort in which their parents live. Scanty fires, turned or even second-hand clothing, combined with a diet of porridge, hake, and a scrag-end stew as a treat on Sunday washed down with cheap tea or water are not alluring inducements to accept thirty years' service in a tropical climate."

"I am afraid," remarked Lawrence laughing, "I am up against you all on these questions."

"You are Lawrence," replied Major Chapman. "But you are the sort of chap the powers that be should send to the Varsities to lecture on the delights of an Indian career. Instead they depute exalted obsoletes who indulge in platitudinous vapourings which fall on the ears of respectful but suspicious youth; the latter, knowing perfectly well that only the very few can rise, would be much more impressed by the views of a hardworking capable man still to win his spurs. Now let us join the ladies."

As everyone played Bridge, it was decided that one lady and one man should cut out in each rubber. Mary and Harold Lawrence being the two thus selected, the others started play.

"Shall we look on, Mr. Lawrence, or talk? If the latter we'd better move from the vicinity of the table."

"I am for a talk, Miss Chapman. Why not move to those comfortable chairs I saw in the verandah as I entered. By the way, I do hope you were not bored by all that chat at dinner? I felt dreadfully guilty, but Indian dinners like this are often spoilt by futile wrangles of that sort. I suppose it is caused by the near approach of the hot weather, although in my case I fear my argumentative faculties get stirred up by old Aldridge's fulminations."

"I wasn't the least bit bored, Mr. Lawrence; indeed I was greatly interested. As for mother, you know she hates conversation, either conventional or the reverse. I heard you mention that you were in the political service. Tell me, that is if you don't mind, why you returned to ordinary—what do you call it—executive?—work."

Lawrence glanced at the girl beside him. Could she possibly know what the difference was?

Mary noticed his hesitation and inquired what he was thinking about.

" I was wondering, Miss Chapman, if your short experience of India had made you acquainted with the meaning of the political service. You know I have met people just out from the old country who imagined its members were paid politicians—using that word in the home sense."

Mary laughed.

" I can't say I know much about it, Mr. Lawrence, but I have heard Dad talk about it, and he once said he wished he had gone into it, but I do know that people in the political service are connected with the Native States and act the part of petty ambassadors. Am I not right ? "

" Yes, that's about it, but I should omit the word petty if talking to someone in the Political. They don't think themselves petty at all. I left it because I found the life too easy going."

" What an unusual reason for abandoning anything in these degenerate days, when most folks are on the look out for a highly salaried cushy job," replied Mary.

" Yes, I suppose I am one of those exceptions which prove the rule. At first I found the life interesting, but I soon discovered that the process of accomplishing anything is tedious, and although I do not consider myself a prig, I not only like doing things, but also seeing the results. In the political service if one succeeds, for a moment, in accomplishing anything useful one has to endure the mortification of seeing it all undone a few weeks afterwards. To be a success one has to be endowed with a very high sense of humour and combine the patience of a Job with the cunning of the serpent to which may be added a liberal endowment of sycophancy."

" I am longing to visit one of the less advanced Native States, Mr. Lawrence, in fact I'd like to visit them all in turn."

Lawrence reflected a moment.

" If you really mean that, Miss Chapman, I think I can secure invitations for your father, mother and yourself to the installation by the Viceroy of the young Maharajah of Ghorapur. Unless you visit one of these States—by the way, you should not call them Native but Indian—during some sort of ceremonial, or intend to make a prolonged visit, you won't see much that is different from British India."

" Thanks ever so much, I'll manage father all right."

" Very well, I will procure the invitations ; if you can't manage the parents they can decline ; but I think that rubber has finished as I see they have stopped playing."

It was Mrs. Chapman's turn to sit out with Colonel Aldridge. Mary cut in with the Railway man, opposing her father and Lawrence.

A very long rubber ensued and on its conclusion Colonel Aldridge took his departure accompanied by the Railway man.

Lawrence lingered a few minutes as he wanted to persuade Major Chapman to join him and Greatorix in a small beat for a panther lying up in some rocky hills about fifteen miles out.

" Thanks, Lawrence, I shall be delighted."

" Right ! Then meet me on Thursday next at the 15th Mile Stone Mallakota Road at 8 a.m. I'll bring the drinks and grub."

Mary, overhearing the invitation, stepped up to her father.

" Dad," she said, " do you think Mr. Lawrence would mind if I came as a spectator. I'll be most discreet and won't be in anyone's way."

" Why, of course come, Miss Chapman," acquiesced Lawrence. " I'll consider it a privilege to entertain you ; you can have old Tuggi the Malguzars elephant. Do you know how to finger the 350 Winchester, as I have one ? "

"Thanks awfully, Mr. Lawrence, but I won't try to shoot ; indeed, I couldn't bear to think of killing even a panther, but I would like to see the beat. Do let me come, Dad."

"What's your mother got to say on the subject ?" replied her father, glancing towards Mrs. Chapman. "By all means go, Mary," replied her mother, "and look after your father."

CHAPTER VIII

A BEAT FOR PANTHER

Punctually at 6.30 Mary and her father, with his orderly, Rup Singh, set off in the wheezy Ford, which, in due course, brought them to the rendezvous where they found that they were the first on the scene. The next to appear was Captain Greatorix in his Sunbeam, who, with a cheery wave of his topi exclaimed :

" Hello, Major—and Miss Chapman too I see—good morning ! I quite thought Lawrence would be here. Are there no beaters or shikaries about ? I hope there isn't a mix up over dates or something."

" I am sure it's all right, Greatorix," replied Major Chapman. " Lawrence being a busy fellow has probably waited to polish off a job or two before starting; as to the beaters I expect they are at their posts."

" So you are to be blooded again, Miss Chapman," remarked Captain Greatorix, addressing Mary. " Thorough-going pacifists make thorough-going slayers once they taste blood."

" Don't be horrible, Captain Greatorix. I don't want to kill the poor panther, but I'd like to see a beat, also feel what it is like to ride on an elephant outside the Zoo."

" So Harold—I mean Lawrence—is providing you with an elephant, is he ? I wonder where he has stowed the little creature. If it's old Tuggi he'll put you up on his back quite gracefully, keeping you the right end up, too."

The sound of a hooter in the distance announced the approach of Lawrence.

" Good morning everyone, sorry I am late, but I

was detained by one of my Police Officers trying to disturb my radical views by persuading me to issue a prohibitory order against some infernal fellow who wants to address our friends in the Bazaar on the suitability of a universal Hartal ; but I refused to be cajoled and have detailed a verbose creature to address the meeting at the same time on the subject of reducing the Government rate for grain—he'll get a hearing all right, the others won't. Now we must leave the cars here and walk a mile to where we shall pick up Tuggi and take post for the day's fray."

The party left the road, following a jungle track which led towards a crescent of low hills.

After proceeding about a mile they were met by Lawrence's shikari ; standing near by was Tuggi.

" Now Miss Chapman, you must draw lots as to whether Jack Greatorix or myself accompany you."

Harold Lawrence held out two bits of straw to Mary.

" Long I go—short, Greatorix."

Mary drew the long one.

" Chapman, will you go to the south horn of the crescent, while you, Jack, to the north. We'll post ourselves somewhere in between over by that clump of bamboo. I think that will cover most of the possible exits from the little valley. As soon as we are in position I'll show the communist emblem which true to its traditions will set the assassination plot going. Remember one long blast on the whistle means hit but not killed ; two blasts dead."

Much to Mary's relief, the elephant was made to kneel whilst she clambered up on to the shooting pad. The Mahout taking charge, they swung off into the jungle, the queer heaving movement of the animal being suggestive of an open boat anchored in a ground swell. They quickly arrived at their place, when Lawrence, by a wave of the red flag, put the invisible line of beaters into motion.

For some time nothing could be heard. Then far away up the valley came an occasional faint cry, accompanied by the beat of a tom-tom. As the minutes sped by the sound began to increase in volume.

In the hope of staving off the feeling of nausea occasioned by Tuggi's gait—even when standing halted there was a swaying movement and his peculiar effluvia, Mary eagerly accepted a cigarette offered by Lawrence.

"How long will the beat take?" she inquired, feeling apprehensive that the situation might overwhelm her.

"Oh, about an hour; feeling groggy?"

"Just a little bit."

"Sorry I can't hurry things, but look, do you see that dark object moving along the hill side? that's a boar, and that proves that the beat must be working up pretty fast."

Mary, straining her eyes, could just detect a brown smudge moving along the side of the hill in the direction indicated.

"Do you shoot pig?"

"Yes, sometimes, but not if one wants a panther; firing from this position would probably put the quarry back through the line. There are more pig, also a brace of Jackal."

The cries of the beaters were now audible. The pig, after running about on the hillside, suddenly disappeared from view. Lawrence touched her on the shoulder, and, following the direction he pointed in, Mary noticed a hideous-looking striped creature with an ill kempt mane coming straight towards them about one hundred yards off.

"A hyena. We'll let it go."

Almost immediately afterwards the sounder of pig that had disappeared from view came into sight on the right, moving leisurely towards the open plain.

The din was increasing ; above the cry of the beaters and noise of the tom-toms could now and again be heard the report of a blank round fired by one of the shikaris.

A few turbaned dots could be discerned on the crest of the hills—the line was becoming visible.

" Something ought to happen pretty soon," murmured Lawrence, " unless the quarry has made off during the night."

There is an increase in the shouting. Harold quietly reached for his double-barrelled 500 Express rifle. Suddenly a veritable pandemonium seemed to be let loose amongst the beaters.

" Ah, he's there, all right, I wonder which gun he'll come to ? " whispered Lawrence as he scanned the hillside with his binoculars, adding, " seeing a panther skin in the drawing-room, or as a wrap, is a very different thing to seeing it in real life ; the protective colouring is so perfect."

" It seems to me a pity that the skin isn't even more invisible," replied Mary : what an undertaking in order to slay one creature ! "

Another yell from the *line* which was now half way down the valley's side ; then a tawney smudge passed like lightning from some rocky thicket, but disappeared at once.

" That's it," whispered Lawrence.

" I didn't see it—whatever *it* means," remarked Mary petulantly.

The beaters closed in, their shouts rising to one continuous yell as they hurl sticks and stones into the patch of jungle where the quarry was marked down. Some crackers are thrown towards the spot, their fussy detonations adding to the turmoil. Out bolts the victim straight towards Major Chapman.

The sharp crack of a rifle followed by its reverberating echoes up the valley caused Mary to hold her breath : moreover, in spite of her declared resolution to shut her eyes, she was straining them in the

direction of her father. A long blast on the whistle followed.

"Now we join in," remarked Lawrence as he re-adjusted the sighting on his rifle. A word to the Mahout and Tuggi began to push his way to where the firing had been heard. Major Chapman was soon viewed seated on a rock with his rifle across his knees.

Lawrence hailed him.

"Which way, Chapman? Have you any idea how hard he's hit?"

"Not sure," shouted Chapman. "But I fear I holed him in the tummy somewhere. I saw him bolt into that patch of thorns by the ravine."

The shikaris having appeared, a short interrogation by Lawrence decided the next move.

"The beaters are to draw well back, posting themselves securely. Major Chapman to cover the spot where the quarry is believed to be lying up, whilst we go over to fetch along Greatorix who will be put up the hill: we'll then push Tuggi into the ravine."

Tuggi ambled his way to where Captain Greatorix was impatiently awaiting events. The situation being explained, Greatorix offered to move round on foot.

"No you don't, Jack," said Lawrence. "The jungle is too thick, you might get scragged: clamber up here; we'll dump you in the right-spot."

"Isn't it amazing what an elephant can get over with four people on his back," commented Lawrence as Tuggi picked his way amongst the rocks and through the thick jungle up the hill side. One or two saplings obstructing his passage were rudely torn down; trappy ground was carefully sounded before he would submit his weight to it. However, a few minutes of mountaineering sufficed to take them to the place where it was judged Greatorix should station himself. Then began the really ticklish business of locating and finishing off the wounded brute—the most dangerous that man hunts.

A move was made to the exact spot where Major Chapman had wounded the animal. The Mahout pointed out blood marks on the ground. Very deliberately the elephant began to follow up the tracks whilst Lawrence carefully scanned the rocks and bushes on either side.

They were entering a narrow ravine, the ground rising abruptly on either side. Tuggi raising his trunk stopped dead. A growling snarl was followed by a quiver of the howdah. At the same time Mary became aware of two balls of glinting greenish fire set in a tawny bloodstreaked mask on the far side of the pad. The wounded animal had sprung on to the rear corner of the Howdah from the hill-side not eight feet away : his claws dripping in gore were set in the woodwork. Mary could almost feel the brute's fetid breath, and cowered in the opposite corner.

Lawrence, crouching as he looked ahead, was taken unawares, and embarrassed by the elephant's struggles to be rid of an unwelcome intruder, almost fell headlong to the ground, but recovering himself by a great effort, managed to empty both his barrels into the panther, which caused the latter to let go.

Pausing for a moment to satisfy himself that he had finished off the brute he sounded two blasts on the whistle.

The crash of the rifle followed by the stifling fumes completed Mary's undoing, and Lawrence, turning towards her, found her in a dead faint.

Moving Tuggi into the open he was preparing to get her down when he encountered Greatorix, who, having seen the incident from his point of vantage, had hurried down fearing a catastrophe.

Together they lifted the girl from the pad and then placing her under a shady tree looked at one another, uncertain what to do next. The eyes of each betrayed the primordial signal ' she's mine.'

The effect of the whistle blasts soon became appar-

ent. In a few minutes innumerable beaters with the shikaris appeared on the scene to collect around the kill ; amongst them Major Chapman.

" I am afraid your girl has been a bit bowled over by events, Chapman," said Lawrence : " I suggest you send away for the car to bring up the tiffin and drinks."

" Why, what's happened ? It all sounded very straightforward work."

" I'll tell you all about it later," replied Lawrence, " but just send for the food now."

Major Chapman dispatched Rup Singh, then hurried to his daughter. She had not come to. Seizing a half-filled water bottle he dashed the contents over her face.

Mary opened her eyes.

" Where am I, Dad ? Is that horrible brute dead and out of my sight."

" Quite dead, and unless you want the skin you need never see a whisker of him again, but tell me what happened ? "

" I don't know, Dad, but it was worse than the most dreadful nightmare."

Major Chapman looked at Lawrence.

" Wait till we've had something to eat and drink then I'll explain," replied the latter. " I see the car coming up."

The meal completely restored Mary even to the point of enabling her to make merry over the incident. In a few words she related to her father what had happened, apologising to Harold Lawrence for her miserable collapse.

" It was the best thing you could do next to shooting the brute yourself. I should not have exposed you to such a risk by entering the ravine."

" I thought I should have shown more grit," she replied.

" You probably would have done so if someone else had been in real danger. Anyhow, you will be

pleased to hear that your father has bagged an 8.6 male panther, which is some compensation."

"You cannot complain, Miss Chapman, of lack of thrills since you arrived in India," remarked Captain Greatorix, "can you? A bomb at Canauj, and now this affair."

"No, Captain Greatorix, I have no complaints on that score." Recalling her adventure on the river, she added, "they come in threes, don't they? I wonder what the next one will be."

CHAPTER IX

THE INSTALLATION OF A RAJAH

Returning from an early morning ride with Captain Greatorix a few days later, Mary, on looking through the post which the orderly had just brought, noticed an envelope, embossed with the arms of the State of Ghorapur, addressed to her mother.

Having appropriated her own letter and given those for her mother to the ayah, she went off to get her bath.

Mrs. Chapman not being an early riser generally perused the morning correspondence in bed, so Mary had to wait until the late breakfast hour, when her father returned from parade before she discovered if the envelope contained the hoped-for invitation.

To her great disappointment the subject was not alluded to at breakfast, but later on, when Major Chapman was enjoying a cheroot on the verandah, his wife casually mentioned she had received an invitation from the Maharajah of Ghórapur to attend his installation.

"Isn't it strange, Jane, I knew the boy's father years ago, when we were both together at Indur as youngsters. I wonder what made the lad think of me."

"I fancy it is Abercrombie the Resident, Jim, who is responsible. You were both at Charterhouse together : don't you remember, he asked you to a shoot once, but you couldn't go. As the invitation includes Mary I am sure it originated with him. Shall we accept or not ? It won't be an expensive

journey if the State run us over their own line, free, as they apparently intend doing."

"I'd rather like to see the show, Jane, so would both of you : better accept ; I am sure one of my numerous creditors will provide the wherewithal."

Mary felt thrilled with the prospect. Even her mother seemed to catch the infection, discussing with zest the details of one or two new frocks she proposed ordering at once.

On the day of their departure a bullock cart load of luggage proceeded to the Railway station in charge of the faithful Yussaf, and the old Ford, which followed with the travellers, fully upheld its reputation as the poor man's lorry.

The journey was tedious, and involved nearly thirty-six hours of travelling, as well as three changes, but to Mary the ever-varying panorama was a source of infinite delight.

The train's stopping at every station, afforded her opportunity of studying the crowds assembled on the low platforms. As British India was left farther and farther behind a gradual change in the appearance and character of the people gathered at the stations was noticeable : colours increased, bustle decreased—the train waited until the passengers had suited themselves as to seating. Not a single European was to be seen.

At one place a hideous old hag was wrangling with a woman who denied her entrance to an already overflowing woman's compartment. The altercation was marked by high pitched screaming. An interested crowd had collected round the door involved in the dispute. Suddenly a young Eurasian ticket-collector, who had thrust himself into the fracas, said something. A shout of laughter went up from the audience on the platform, and from those occupants of the adjoining compartments who had been able to squeeze their heads through the windows. The turmoil ceased abruptly.

Major Chapman had joined in the merriment.

"What can you see to laugh at in such a revolting spectacle, Jim?" remarked his wife.

Mary inquired what the joke was.

"That lad ought to be a telephone operator. Of course you don't follow what he said, but the remark to the old lady was: 'Oh beautiful damsel, on account of your sweet voice no one can hear the whistle of the engine!'"

At another jungle halt—it could hardly be styled a station—numbers of monkeys came bounding down from the hills as soon as they heard the approach of the train. The passengers threw them bits of chaupatties which were eagerly seized, and munched with evident relish. Mary got out with her father to watch the strange sight.

So accustomed were the monkeys to the regular arrival of this daily meal that they were quite fearless and moved about amongst the travellers as if travellers themselves.

Mary held out some biscuits, which, not being on the usual menu, so to speak, were examined with considerable care before being accepted for consumption. Having been found particularly toothsome—they were sweet ones—quite a crowd of applicants came forward.

"Imagine such a scene at a wayside station in England, Dad. I shall call the place Monkeypur."

The train rumbled on across the sandy wastes. Here and there were to be seen the crumbling walls of some ancient fort: everything seemed to be in a state of decay—even the railway stations looked dilapidated and unkempt.

"Is nothing new ever built in this part of the world, Dad?"

"I have often asked myself that question," replied her father. "I cannot recollect ever having seen a new building outside the big cities—it's one of India's mysteries."

Early the next morning they pulled up at a small station where Yussaf brought in the morning tea. Major Chapman, having put his head out of the window in order to see where they were called Mary to look. Far away in the western distance she could just discern the battlements of some fortress rising sheer from the plain.

"That," said her father, "is the capital of our host, and *there* are incarcerated the ladies of the Court. We'd better hurry as we'll be in soon."

When, some time later, the carriage came to a standstill an Indian officer approached, and announced himself as one of His Highness' A.D.C.'s. Major Chapman got out and shook hands with him.

"A car is ready, Sahib, to take you to the camp. The heavy luggage will follow in a lorry."

While the carriage was being cleared, Major Chapman introduced his wife and daughter, after which the party proceeded to the car.

The sight of the guests' camp captivated Mary. Row upon row faultlessly aligned spotless tents surrounded with red footpaths. Outside their particular tent was a board bearing their names; beside it a little red post-box. An obsequious servant was ready to receive them at the door.

Mary gave a gasp as she entered. Even at Canauj she had seen nothing to compare with this for luxury. The interior was hung with pale yellow draperies. Her own bedroom tent was replete with every modern convenience, including electric light, radiators, and fans—even a bedside telephone. In the sitting-room were laid out all the English Illustrated papers and a selection of magazines. An invitation to dinner at The Residency was on the writing table, together with a complete time table of the various functions.

"Will your Honour be pleased to have hazari here or in the large dining tent?" asked the servant in attendance.

" Which shall it be, Jane ? "

" Oh, here for this occasion, Jim."

The remainder of the morning was spent unpacking, whilst Major Chapman busied himself writing his name in the necessary visitors' books. Later in the afternoon they went for a short motor drive before foregathering in the great lounge marquee where Major and Mrs. Chapman renewed several old acquaintanceships amongst the guests who had arrived. To Mary's great delight the Meads were there.

Mr. and Mrs. Abercrombie came in and Mary being introduced, learnt that the dinner was quite a small affair.

" To enable some of the real strangers to meet one another, Chapman," remarked the Resident : you'd better wear uniform, however, as the Agent to the Governor General, who is rather on his dignity, will be present."

The Residency looked like a fairy palace, covered as it was by twinkling coloured electric lights.

" We are having a trial of our own illuminations to-night, just to be sure that everything is in order before the Viceroy arrives," intimated Mrs. Abercrombie to Mrs. Chapman as they shook hands.

Mary found herself being introduced to the man who was to take her into dinner—a Mr. Earl Yerks, of New York.

Like many of his countrymen, he used the English language with pungent and telling effect and amused Mary by the originality of his comments. They had hardly been seated a few minutes when he noticed that the decoration worn by his vis-à-vis—it happened to be the emblem of the Companionship of the Indian Empire which is worn below the tie—had become undone and was slowly slipping beneath the waistcoat ; he leaned across the table during a momentary lull in the conversation.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "I reckon your bib brooch has got side-tracked."

The remark which raised a laugh from everyone shattered that somewhat sedate tone which is so often a marked feature of Indian dinner-parties of this description. It gained for Mr. Yerks the ear of the table. Everyone was trying to listen to him—a situation he took full advantage of. A lawyer by education and journalist by profession, his versatility was amazing.

Serious Bridge followed by irresponsible mild roulette completed the evening's entertainment.

At ten the next morning the Chapmans, along with the other guests, repaired to the place especially set apart for viewing the State Entrance of His Majesty's Representative. The spot chosen was ideally situated on the walls of the ancient city, close to one of the historic gates. From it a perfect view could be obtained of the processional route. The position must have been selected by an artist, it accorded so well with the mediæval nature of the ceremony.

To the right could be viewed, for a considerable distance, the street, lined with Infantry and thronged with sight-seers, along which the procession would advance; to the left the massive turretted structure of the Hartipol (Elephant Gate). In the foreground and middle distance the quaint bazaar of Ghorapur; whilst in the background, almost overhanging the town to the height of one thousand feet, stood out the great red fortress, its beetling ramparts crowning a mighty rock escarpement suggesting absolute impregnability.

A puff of smoke appeared on the skyline of the fort, followed by the boom of a gun—the Viceroy's special had arrived—and as the muzzle-loading battery thundered out its salute, the faint strains of the National Anthem could be heard in the distance.

Whilst waiting for the procession to appear, Mary chatted to Lucy Mead.

"You must point me out all the celebrities, Lucy. I won't know one from the other in all these trappings."

"Why bother, Mary: let it be a festival for the eyes. Speech will break the spell by introducing a touch of modernism."

"Yes, but I would like to know who the important people are."

"No one is of importance, only the picture, Mary. What you will see is an exquisite piece of age-old pageantry—the personalities are nothing. A thousand years ago the same scene took place: centuries hence it will not have changed."

"I wonder if it is safe for the Viceroy to pass along such a narrow crowded thoroughfare, Lucy. Any one could fling a bomb, or shoot."

"Yes, but unspeakable retribution would fall on all those associated with the quarter from whence came the missile, Mary. Collective punishment reaches a high pitch of perfection when untrammelled by Exeter Hall, and the fear of it makes irresponsible persons exercise remarkable discrimination as to who is in those balconies or on the house tops."

Just then the stalwart figures of two mounted British police officers emerged into view.

"Here they come, Mary," remarked Lucy Mead. "Now look and keep on looking."

Mary needed no pressing.

About one hundred yards behind the police officers came a posse of mounted warriors enveloped in chain mail, their eyes just visible through slits which invested them with a sinister appearance. Then came two squadrons of Imperial Service Lancers, perfectly equipped and turned out, the men riding their carefully picked horses with graceful ease. Following at a hundred paces or so was a gor-

geously caparisoned elephant bearing the Viceroy and Vicereine ; behind it another carrying the young Maharajah, which, in turn, was succeeded by a dozen or more elephants in pairs abreast carrying the chief nobles of the State. Then two more squadrons of Lancers, followed by Infantry, Camelry and miscellaneous retainers, the whole forming a picture of rare colouring and setting.

The crowds salaamed respectfully as the Viceroy and Maharajah passed ; the only cheer to be heard coming from the vicinity of the Hartipol where were congregated the British guests.

As the end of the procession disappeared through the gateway, Mary closed her eyes for a few moments, then she turned to Lucy Mead.

" Whenever I feel I want a change of scene," she said, " I shall close my eyes and let that wonderful procession pass before my brain : I feel it is so indelibly stamped there for all time that I can turn it on like a cinematograph."

" You will be able to release two more cerebral bioscopic effects before the day is over, Mary—the inauguration and State banquet."

" Yes, but they will be stationary affairs, and I shall be a participator : somehow or other, I can never renew them in the same way."

At 2.30 the Installation took place in the Great Hall of Audience. Mary was able to make a critical examination, from comparatively close quarters, of the wonderful ceremonial garments and their wearers.

The variety in make, shape and hue was extraordinary, culminating in the group of State Nobles aligned by seniority on gilt chairs to the right and left of the throne who formed a band-like zone of scintillating colour : and what contrasts ! Here an old grey-beard in a faded raiment of a bye-gone epoch ; there, a youth adorned in all the glory of a sumptuous brocade.

As Mary scrutinised each in turn, she suddenly became aware that her eyes were resting on Pertab Singh. He responded by a smiling recognition.

A fanfare announced the arrival of the young Maharajah. This was the first time that Mary had seen him close at hand. He appeared a mere strippling of under average height and much too young to be invested with the responsibilities of ruling a great State. From an Englishman's point of view he did not possess good looks nor did his general appearance suggest intellectuality, but rather that of a pleasant, genial disposition. He bore himself with distinction as he moved to his throne without a suspicion of self-consciousness.

Another fanfare followed by the National Anthem signalled the entrance of the Viceroy.

The ceremony was a short one. Permission having been accorded to the Foreign Secretary to declare the Durbar open, His Excellency read in English a carefully prepared speech extolling the meritorious services rendered to the State by the various persons associated with the administration during His Highness's minority, winding up with an exhortation to the young Ruler to use, beneficially, the great powers that were about to be conferred on him.

"Quite enough to make him a tyrannical scoundrel"—whispered Lucy Mead to Mary.

His Highness then read his carefully prepared reply, replete with fulsome praise for all that had been done, and protestations of his loyal devotion. He asserted his intention to follow the path of righteousness mapped out for him. A translation in the vernacular followed. The presentation of certain nobles to the Viceroy terminated the proceedings.

As the assemblage dispersed and the Chapmans were waiting for the lesser elements to make their exit, Mary noticed that Pertab Singh was gradually

making his way towards where she was standing. To the casual observer it looked as if he was being borne along with the others, but to Mary his movements were deliberate. As he came up to her she acknowledged his oriental salute. Then, turning to her father, said :

"Dad, let me introduce you to Thakur Pertab Singh, whom I met at Canauj."

Major Chapman cordially held out his hand :

"I am delighted to meet you, Thakur Sahib," he said. "I can now personally thank you for having saved the lives of my wife and daughter."

"That is nothing to mention, Sahib."

"Oh, but indeed it was a very gallant action, Thakur Sahib," interjected Mrs. Chapman, who felt that her present environment necessitated some recognition on her part.

"Of course you will all be attending the State Banquet to-night," remarked Pertab Singh, abruptly turning the subject, "and to-morrow morning, I believe, I am to show you all how we captured an impregnable fortress in days gone by."

"We hadn't heard of that," said Mary, "had we, Dad? There is a blank in the programme—to afford us a respite after to-day's junketings."

"Well, I daresay that was partly the idea, my little show being put on as an afterthought for the more robust. His Excellency is sleeping to-night in the train which leaves early to-morrow morning so the Viceregal party will not be present."

At this juncture the Resident, returning to the Durbar Hall to give some orders, and noticing Pertab Singh, exclaimed :

"Hello, Thakur Sahib! You here? Why didn't your uncle come?"

"He was ill, Sahib; so being his heir he made me his deputy. I was coming anyhow; also the Durbar wanted me to put up a show for the guests with my trained Ghors."

"Of course ! I'd almost forgotten them. You must see it, Chapman, a unique exhibition of daring skill, I am told. Man has trained many animals, but there isn't a European here who has seen this remarkable display. I tried to persuade the Viceroy to stop, but he couldn't. Mr. Yerks has got some of the cinematograph men up from Calcutta to see if it can be filmed."

"What's a Ghor ? " inquired Mary.

"A huge lizard, Miss Chapman—I think you call it the Iguana ; but I'm not going to enter into its virtues now : you can judge for yourself to-morrow."

By this time the Durbar Hall having emptied itself, the party passed out to their motors.

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The State Banquet was another festival of colour. The Palace, where it took place, being illuminated by thousands of multi-coloured electric lights which outlined not only the great building, but every turret, window, nook and cranny throughout the fabric, with a wealth of detail only attainable in a country where labour is cheap, and gifted with a natural instinct for creating beautiful pyrotechnic effects.

Ample time had been allowed for His Highness to be introduced to each of his guests before the Viceroy was announced.

As Mary shook hands with the young ruler, she thought his manner becomingly attractive, and vaguely wondered if the average well-born English youth could have filled the rôle with such simple dignity.

At dinner she found herself seated between Captain Mead and Pertab Singh, and she was thus spared the ordeal of making conversation with strangers. Indeed, so absorbed was she in talking to both that she hardly noticed the menu which embraced everything that an enterprising caterer could offer with-

out losing his professional reputation. The table decorations were disappointing, as although magnificent in their way, the lack of cleanliness in the plate, and inartistic floral arrangements struck a garish note.

Complimentary speeches of the platitudinous type having been delivered and the usual toasts proposed and honoured, the ladies withdrew, curtesying to the Viceroy as they went out.

Whilst waiting for the men to come in, several introductions were made to Her Excellency. Mary watched the proceedings with no little amusement.

"Conversation under such circumstances must be a strain for both parties," she remarked to Lucy.

"Yes, sometimes. I have been through it Mary, but occasionally it leads to humorous incidents. For example, not long ago the exalted lady got her notes mixed—they generally have some—and the result was that I was mistaken for the wife of a well-known adventurer on the turf, blessed with a considerable fortune. It took me quite three minutes to dissipate the libellous assumption."

The entry of the Viceroy rapidly terminated the evening. He looked tired and abstracted. After chatting for a few minutes to one or two Indians presented to him by the Maharajah, he signified his wish to view the illuminations, and then join his train.

The guests were therefore assembled on the terrace outside. An A.D.C. having pressed an electric switch, a rocket went soaring upwards from the ramparts of the Fort. Simultaneously all the important public buildings became outlined by myriads of coloured electric lights, whilst bonfires showed their flames on many of the hills surrounding Ghorapur.

One of His Highness' A.D.C.'s then invited the guests to follow His Excellency to the railway station in order to view the illuminations in the

Bazaar. As soon as the Viceregal party had left, the Chapmans made a tour of the city and the surrounding residential quarters.

Nearly every house was adorned with some form of lighting effect, the most attractive being that evolved from the tiny earthenware saucer filled with oil in which floated a lighted wick. Under favourable weather conditions this century-old method eclipses any modern one, but wind or rain are its dreaded enemies. On this particular night the ancient half candle power *buti* quite overwhelmed the 30 Watt. incandescent lamp.

"What a day!" murmured Mary to herself, as she got into bed thoroughly tired out.

The next morning, after breakfast, the guests motored up to one of the entrances to the Fort. Here, leaving their cars, they were conducted along the base of the rock escarpment to a point where it rose sheer for one hundred and fifty feet or so.

Pertab Singh was already there. By him on the ground was a repulsive looking reptile of the lizard species, about four feet long, with its keeper and one or two other dilapidated looking human specimens.

An A.D.C. having announced that His Highness was not coming, Pertab Singh informed the guests that he was about to demonstrate how an apparently unscaleable wall could be surmounted without the aid of a ladder or spikes:

"In days gone by," he said, "more than one fortress in India was captured in this way. This," pointing to the reptile, "is known as a Ghor."

The trainer with his assistants now fastened two light lines to a sort of collar round the neck of the animal. It was then touched on the tail with a stick. The brute at once moved to the precipice and began climbing rapidly. Up, and up it went, carrying with it the lines, the keeper using them as reins and thus being able to exercise some guidance.

The spectators had to rivet their gaze on the weird

creature, which, owing to its protective colouring was practically invisible.

It took about five minutes for it to reach what looked like the top of the wall ; then as its head appeared to get level with the parapet, the keeper tightened his hold on the reins.

Next, a boy about six years old, took the reins from the trainer and being careful to keep a steady pull on them started to climb the wall.

The spectators were fascinated by the activity of the little lad, who, manipulating the lines with great skill, appeared to walk up the precipice.

"What holds the lines so securely, Thakur Sahib ?" inquired one of the guests.

"The Ghor, Sahib. Immediately he feels the pull of his keeper, he grips the spot where he is with great tenacity, fearing he will fall. This grip, which will support a weight of about fifty pounds, can be exercised on almost any surface."

The boy having reached the top, dexterously swung himself over the parapet, being followed by the Ghor. A ringing cheer broke out from the guests.

A rope of some strength was now attached to the line still dangling down, and the boy having pulled it up, fastened it to one of the loopholes. A youth, aged about fourteen, now climbed up, and on arrival, both hauled up another rope strong enough to allow a full grown man to ascend.

Two or three now climbed up, including the Ghor's keeper ; then a crude sort of rope ladder, capable of bearing three or four men, replaced the single rope.

"Is there anyone who would like to scale the wall ?" said Pertab Singh, laughing. "I will now go up for a few minutes just to show you how easy the rest is."

Up he went with an agility which would have done credit to a top gallant reefer of Nelson's day. Having waited a few minutes to regain his breath, he descended.

"Wa-all, I reckon that's about the cutest thing Earl Yerks has visualized, and there's dollars to be had for the taking if we could fetch the outfit to Noo York : say, Thakur Sahib, can't you rig a show for my picture men sometime when I can fix a special apparatus."

Pertab Singh laughed. "I don't know, Sahib. But will see what can be done on one condition."

"And what's that?" inquired Mr. Yerks.

"That you are the first man up the rope."

"I'll accept," replied the redoubtable American, nothing daunted by his fifteen stone weight.

The guests having made their way back to the gateway were then shown over the armoury and jewel-room.

Pertab Singh appointed himself as escort to Mary, and she was thus able to learn many interesting details about the various objects they saw.

On returning to camp they found a note awaiting them from the Resident saying that he was making up a small party to visit the ancient town of Achalgarh, situated in the heart of the desert. It was proposed to start next day, and as the journey involved a long motor drive, a stay of two nights at Achalgarh was necessary. Would the Chapmans care to join the party?

Mrs. Chapman at once decided not to go.

"I couldn't stand the drive, Jim, but there is no reason why you and Mary should not go. I will take a much needed rest here until you return. Most of the guests are leaving this afternoon, so I shall have a quiet time."

It was thus agreed, and Major Chapman ringing up the Resident accepted for himself and Mary, inquiring what hour they were to start.

"Seven a.m. sharp, at the Residency, Chapman. Remember, only a light suit-case apiece. I am sending a special car for you both."

CHAPTER X

IN THE HEART OF THE DESERT

Three cars were at the Residency ready to start at the appointed hour.

Mr. Abercrombie, who was on the steps interrogating the drivers, greeted Mary and her father.

"Anyhow, you have turned up, Chapman ; four of our party have ratted at the last minute, so we have dispensed with one car."

"Who, then, are the remaining others ? " asked Mary.

"Of course ! I forgot to tell your father last night, Miss Chapman—the Meads : and here they come."

"How splendid !" cried Mary, waving her hand to Lucy, as the latter got out of her car. "I never expected such luck."

"Better keep your ecstasy for the end of the journey, Mary. I get very grumpy when the road is bumpy, which I am sure it will be : are there no other adventurers besides ourselves ? "

"None," put in the Resident. "We are the sole survivors—antipathy to the excursionist principle, I fear. Now, pray, pay attention while I explain our order of march. Major Chapman and I will do pilot, followed by the servants. You, your brother and Miss Chapman will bring up the rear. If anything goes wrong, give three hoots, and we will pull up. The drivers know, but I tell you as well. Now let us be off ; it is getting late."

For the first twenty miles or so the countryside showed some signs of cultivation, but as they got farther and farther from Ghorapur the landscape became more arid, and the road faded to an indistinct sandy track.

At noon they halted for lunch near a miserable village. All the inhabitants turned out to scrutinize the travellers and their strange vehicles, more closely, in spite of heroic efforts on the part of the three Indian chauffeurs to keep the audience at a respectful distance. The meal had to be consumed under conditions of publicity which many an actor manager would have envied.

"We shall have plenty of privacy from now on," declared Mr. Abercrombie; "there are no more habitations until we reach our destination, eighty miles ahead. We enter the real 'Abode of Death,' as it is called, a few miles from here."

When they started again progress was slow—ten miles an hour being rarely exceeded. The sand got deeper and deeper: on all sides were great billowy hills of it. Hour after hour the cars plodded on, threading their sinuous way between the dunes, and the monotony of the scenery and gentle swaying of the body was almost lulling Mary to sleep.

At about 5 p.m. they stopped before a wretched grass hut which marked the frontier custom post of the State they were about to enter.

At the sound of the hooters an emaciated old grey-beard tottered to the door to ascertain the cause of the strange noise—some new species of camel perhaps! The sight which met his dull sunken eyes seemed to paralyse them. He peered at the Resident as if in a trance.

Mr. Abercrombie's endeavours to make the old buffer comprehend the simple question "How far is it to Achalgarh?" were as picturesque as they were ineffectual. Having tried various paraphrases in at least three dialects he surrendered to the joint efforts of the drivers, who all speaking simultaneously, produced an effect sufficiently jazz-like to reach the old man's understanding; for he suddenly held up all ten fingers uttering the one word 'kos.'

"Twenty miles," chorused the wayfarers together in English.

A slight twitching of the wrinkled old face, almost amounting to a smile, proclaimed that mutual comprehension had been established.

"Not exactly a Baedeker," remarked Lucy Mead, as the cars resumed their way.

Just before sunset the track began to rise slightly as they approached a ridge. On reaching the crest, the leading car stopped and the others closing up, the party alighted. Below them, about five miles distant, lay a town of some considerable size. The place stood out from the desert a labyrinth of yellow, flat-roofed buildings gathered round the base of a buttressed fort—once the remote stronghold of an ancient race.

"What conceivable reason induced anyone to build a town in such a place?" exclaimed Mary.

"Security, Miss Chapman," suggested Mr. Abercrombie. "Before the days of motors or aircraft—the Ruler won't have a railway—one could only reach this place by a thirty-six hour journey on a camel. There is only water enough *en route* for half a dozen at a time, and none too much to spare when you arrive. It would be impossible, therefore, to move against the place with a force of sufficient strength to capture it. During the Great War when the currency panic was at its height, untold sums of rupees were hoarded here. But we had better push on before darkness overtakes us."

After going two miles or so, they struck a made road; and its surface, although not quite what it might have been, afforded a timely relief greatly appreciated by the weary travellers.

The cars skirted the town, and were directed to an imposing looking edifice which Mary learnt was the Guest House—the only modern looking building to be seen.

The impending arrival of the party had been noti-

fied to the Chief the moment it was sighted on the ridge, five miles away. He at once repaired to the Guest House to welcome his visitors, and was on the steps as the Resident's car drew up.

After a brief conversation with Mr. Abercrombie concerning the next day's programme, he withdrew.

Baths, a hurried supper and early bed ended the day. Mary felt very stiff after the long journey.

Sight-seeing commenced at ten by a visit to the Fort, in the vaults of which are preserved many remarkable and rare treasures, including manuscripts beautifully inscribed on palm leaves dating back many centuries. The party then climbed to the highest point in the Fort where their host proudly pointed out the old metal umbrella—an emblem of his family.

They were next conducted through some of the more important streets, where exquisite specimens of finely carved façades were to be seen.

The whole town was constructed of a coarse yellowish coloured limestone. Water was the most precious of commodities ; yet, in spite of the attenuated supply the inhabitants were singularly clean. Of beggars and mendicants, so common elsewhere in India, not one was to be seen. There seemed to be an entire absence of destitution ; a note of happy contentedness prevailed. Newspapers were unknown. There was not even a telegraph, and the postal service functioned only at irregular intervals.

After lunch the Chief personally conducted the visitors to the monuments erected to his departed ancestors, situated about six miles out. The journey was performed on camels, an experience Mary had not previously encountered, nor in this case made provision for in her wardrobe. Lucy Mead was in a similar predicament as regards suitable garments ; but eventually adequate measures for meeting the situation were devised.

Her mount was one of the best obtainable in a

State famous for its camels, and as it moved swiftly over the ground, she was astounded at the smoothness of its gait.

She was very disappointed with the Chattris (canopy), which, like small ornamental pavilions were erected over the ashes of the deceased rulers. Only one or two could lay claims to artistic merit, and the majority were as repellant as their early Victorian counterparts which encumber many an old Christian cemetery in India.

There was little else of interest to be seen. As Lucy Mead pithily remarked, "Achalgarh was a place she preferred to talk about rather than walk about."

Early the next morning the party began its return journey. They stopped for a few minutes on the crest of the ridge from which they had first viewed the town, in order to have a parting look at this isolated relic of a by-gone age. It appeared a more vivid yellow in the early morning sunlight, and the weather-worn old copper umbrella, just discernable on the highest point of the *enceinte* of the fort, seemed a particularly appropriate emblem for this desert sanctuary.

The route was a slightly different one from that by which they had come. Their host had recommended it as less encumbered with sand, but it proved very stoney, which caused endless tyre trouble. Delay after delay took place, and darkness set in while they were still forty miles from home: worse, the guide seemed to become confused by the waning light, and several severe jolts reminded all that unless great care was taken a serious accident was not improbable.

It was decided that the three men should proceed in the leading car in case it got into difficulties and required extricating, and Mary, Lucy Mead, and one servant, followed in rear.

The track was so sinuous, in places that ten

yards between the cars meant disappearing from view.

Suddenly one of the tyres on Mary's car gave out. The driver at once sounded the hooter to warn those in front, repeating the signal several times. He then got down to carry out the necessary repairs. After he had been working for about five minutes Lucy Mead observed that no one had come back to inquire what was wrong, as had previously been the case, so she went to the wheel to repeat the S.O.S. signal.

Still no one came.

"Rather strange!" she commented.

Mary began to feel apprehensive.

"They can't have heard us, Lucy. I remember someone telling me that it is very difficult to hear amidst these sand dunes unless above them."

"Well," replied Lucy, "the only thing to do is to hurry up with the repairs and follow on; we can easily spot the way by the wheel tracks."

Mary followed the beams of their lights to where they played on the supposed to be tracks. There were no tracks.

"Good gracious, Lucy, we must have taken a wrong turn somewhere, there are no tracks to follow!"

"It looks like it Mary; but I'll scout ahead for a few yards and climb one of those dunes. We ought to be able to see the lights."

"Oh, do take care, Lucy! These sand-dunes are so treacherously alike. Don't go more than a few yards."

"You come along too, so that we'll get lost together," jestingly replied Lucy.

They first tried to pick up the track ahead of them but soon saw that no car had preceded them. They then cast back, but were afraid to go very far. Next, having waded to the top of one of the dunes they looked round. There was nothing to be seen, and only the feint rustle of the breeze over the drifting sand could be heard.

"I think the wind is rising," said Lucy, "which will complicate matters by obliterating all tracks." They returned to the car.

"I wonder if the bearer or driver know any English," remarked Mary.

"Oh, that doesn't matter. I know enough Hindustani to carry on with," answered Lucy Mead.

Apparently the servants had already come to the conclusion that a wrong turning had been taken somewhere.

"When the tyre is mended Miss Sahiba, we will go backwards," remarked the driver, "then find where mistake was made. The sahibs will be sure to see loss and come back also."

There was considerable difficulty in turning the car, but at last they began to retrace their steps. They had not gone more than a quarter of mile when they discovered that their own tracks were no longer visible—the wind had obliterated them.

"Now what's to be done?" said Mary. "If the worst comes to the worst, we must doss down here for the night," answered her companion. "But before we come to that I intend to have one more bid for rescue, especially as we are now on fairly high ground."

"How much petrol have we got?" she inquired from the driver.

"Plenty much, Miss Sahiba. I have two tins unused."

"Good! I want the bearer's pugaree."

A coil of greasy material was handed over. Lucy handled it gingerly, declaring that very little petrol would be required. She then went over to a small eminence on which was growing a thorny bush about six feet high, and undoing the turban, she wound it round the bush with the help of the two servants.

"Now loosen one of the electric headlights so that you can turn its beams upwards."

This was done. She then sprinkled some petrol on the turban and told the driver not only to switch on the light, but to keep the beam moving as much as possible. Mary was also directed to sound the hooter vigorously. The pugaree was then set alight.

A pillar of flame about twelve feet high shot up. The hooter blared, whilst the headlight played on the surrounding sand hills. The bush was fortunately dry, so by throwing on more petrol it ignited, burning furiously for about ten minutes.

"That's all we can do, Mary; we must now await events. Let's make ourselves comfortable in the car: if no help comes we must sleep or sit the night out—they are sure to find us in the morning."

Lucy Mead explained matters to the two servants who at once lay down by the car whilst the two girls, getting into it, made themselves comfortable. They left the headlights on.

"Quite an adventure," faltered Mary, dropping off into a doze.

How long they thus remained—they had forgotten to look at their watches—was uncertain, but Lucy was awakened by the sound of voices in the distance, and starting up, noticed three men on camels approaching then. She woke Mary. As the strangers came nearer a voice in English called:

"Who's there?"

Lucy answered enigimatically:

"We are!"

Two of the camels halted, whilst one came forward whose rider was enveloped in a coarse cotton shawl affair. He stopped his mount by the car to peer down at the occupants.

"Surely Miss Mead and Miss Chapman," he said.

Mary at once recognised the voice as that of Pertab Singh.

"Yes, Thakur Sahib, you are quite correct. May I inquire where you have come from and you have

seen the rest of our party—the Resident, Captain Mead and my father ? ”

“ No, I haven’t seen anyone, Miss Chapman. My uncle who lives about three miles away, seeing the fire and bright lights, guessed that something unusual was afoot, so I was sent along with two attendants to satisfy his curiosity. We don’t have many thrills in these parts—and now *what* are you doing here ? ”

Lucy explained in a few words.

“ You must come to my uncle’s house at once.” Then noticing the two servants added, “ I will send for them later.”

He then called up both his attendants directing one to proceed with all haste to warn his aunt that two English ladies would arrive in half an hour’s time and would require supper and sleeping accommodation ; then, turning to Mary said :

“ You must get up behind me, Miss Chapman, whilst Miss Mead mounts the other camel.”

The beasts were made to kneel down whilst the two girls climbed up.

“ We shall only go at a walk,” remarked Pertab Singh. “ If you feel insecure, hold me lightly by the shawl.”

Mary found herself clutching rather tightly.

“ How can you find your way about such a country in the darkness ? ” she inquired.

“ It’s partly instinct, but we also use the stars a good deal, and by day, the sun’s shadow.”

The camels proceeded at a walk, threading their way amongst the sand dunes which formed a veritable maze. Suddenly the surroundings changed, the sand vanished, and they were moving over a hard surface.

“ Only a mile or so more,” observed Pertab. “ You can see a light right ahead of us.”

Mary could just detect a faint twinkle which might have been a star.

They began to rise abruptly ; and all at once a great arched gateway loomed through the darkness : they passed through and were in a courtyard.

Several attendants with lamps appeared, and the girls were assisted to dismount. Pertab Singh held a short colloquy with one of the attendants, then he turned to Miss Mead :

" Please follow me," he said.

They entered a porch from which a flight of dark, narrow stairs led upwards.

Pertab Singh, appropriating one of the lanthorns, led the way, explaining that he was conducting them to the women's apartments where his aunt would take care of them.

The staircase terminated in a room carpeted with a spotless linen floor cloth. There was no furniture, but round the sides were ranged comfortably cushioned divans. The only light was that afforded by a smoky kerosene oil hanging lamp.

A short, stout, grey-haired, wrinkled old lady rose from one of the divans and came forward as they entered.

" My aunt, ladies," said Pertab Singh, by way of introduction.

Lucy held out her hand which was timidly accepted. Then, speaking in Hindustani apologised for the inconvenience they were causing. Mary also shook hands.

Their hostess murmured some unintelligible, but obvious words of welcome. Then Pertab Singh, explaining that he had had no time to make other arrangements, but hoped they would not be uncomfortable, added :

" You will be able to experience a little of *l'Inde sans les Anglais*, Miss Chapman, for my aunt and uncle are very old-fashioned. Some supper will be sent up at once. As Miss Mead knows the language you can ask for anything you want. At dawn to-morrow I will send out some of my men on camels

to search for the rest of your party ; I am sure they are not far off. Good-night ! ”

As soon as he was gone, Lucy Mead turning to their hostess asked if they might wash their hands and tidy up. Two serving women suddenly appeared silently from somewhere and conducted them along a passage to a room where basins, towels and soap were laid out on a window sill.

The floor was covered with the same material as the other apartment. Two very low charpoy bedsteads filled the centre of the room ; sheets and pillows had evidently been hastily supplied. The only other article of furniture was a handsome cheval glass.

Having washed they returned to the sitting-room where, laid out on the floor in front of one of the divans, were two bowls of pillau, a teapot, cups, sugar and milk. Lucy thanking her hostess begged her not to sit up as it was now ten o'clock, so after a few minutes' desultory conversation the latter withdrew.

“ How are we to eat the food, Lucy ? They have sent us no spoons nor forks.”

“ With our fingers : old-fashioned Indians never use our table appointments. Apart from the fear that they might have been defiled by being used by some low-cast person, such things would be considered in bad taste.”

They both found the pillau extremely good and satisfying. When they had finished Lucy called to one of the servants, who, having removed the bowls, again conducted them to their rooms, actually lighting a candle with matches.

As neither Lucy nor Mary had anything with them except what they stood up in, both girls, removing their frocks and shoes, lay down on the beds which were extremely comfortable, and in a few minutes were fast asleep.

CHAPTER XI

BHEEMGARH—THE DESERT FORT

They were awakened the next morning by the servants bringing in the tea. This was laid out on two trays with cloths and other signs of civilisation. One of the servants informed Lucy that hot baths were ready when wanted, also brushes and combs.

"What a relief!" said Mary. "Let's order the baths now so that they will be ready by the time we have finished chota hazari."

When dressed both repaired to the room they had supped in. They were astonished to see a well-appointed English breakfast table with chairs complete. They were still more surprised when they were served with an English breakfast—even eggs and bacon.

"I fancy," remarked Lucy, "that our friend Pertab has been particularly busy on our behalf this morning."

A servant brought in a note for Mary announcing that it was from the Kunwar Sahib.

"What's that?" inquired Mary, taking the missive.

"Pertab, of course," replied Lucy. "That is an ordinary expression for an heir."

Mary opened the envelope.

"DEAR MISS CHAPMAN,

I hope you did not have a very uncomfortable night. You will be glad to hear that one of my camel men has found your father's party. When they missed you they tried to go back; but bending their steering gear of their car when

turning could not drive it, consequently spent the night in the open. They are on the way to the Fort now to breakfast with me, so you will soon meet them again.

Yours sincerely,

PERTAB SINGH."

The servant asked if there was any reply, so Lucy Mead told her to thank the Kunwar Sahib and to say that they had had a very comfortable night.

Having finished their breakfast both girls went out on to a verandah balcony, enclosed within a screen of carved stone, from which they were able to obtain a glimpse of the surrounding country. They found themselves looking north-west. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing but a desolate waste of sand. The building was evidently an old fortress perched on a commanding eminence, and as the balcony upon which they were standing was some fifty feet above the ground, they were able to see to a great distance.

"Did you ever in your life view such a dreary scene," said Mary. "Imagine anyone choosing such a spot as a dwelling place!"

"Well, I don't suppose it was ever selected for its amenities, Mary; I expect that some of Pertab Singh's ancestors were allotted it on military grounds by an overlord with nothing much else to offer. The outlook from Achalgarh is very similar, yet several hundreds of people choose to make that delectable spot their home. Why, my brother has often told me that the men of his squadron who come from these parts would stoutly resist any attempts to move them to more congenial surroundings, and never dream of spending their leave anywhere else, even if bachelors. It's a provision of nature—this attachment to the land of one's birth. When you come to think of it the people reared in a primitive country like this are true children of the soil: they

are of it, and are nurtured with its products. I am sure the predilection shown by the British race for wandering, and often settling abroad, is somehow connected with their diet. For several generations now we have ceased to be nurtured by home-grown products. Indeed, we subsist almost entirely on food which comes from every quarter of the globe, consequently, if my theory is correct, every quarter of the globe calls us. Pressure from over population may have a good deal to do with it, but other countries just as crowded do not display this roving trait."

There was a similar balcony on the opposite side of the room, but the outlook from it was not so grim. A few parched looking fields, some squalid huts collected round the base of the fort, whilst in the distance, a range of low khaki-coloured hills covered with scrub, were visible.

"Just what I thought, Mary," said Lucy; "this Fort is, or rather was, an outpost to protect the more fertile tracts lying to the south-west from the marauding bands who for centuries used the desert as a refuge from pursuit—even in these prosaic days the sand harbours a good many disreputable characters in much the same way as the tribal territory of the north-west frontier."

"I hope I may be spared ever having to act as part of the garrison of such places," replied Mary.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of their hostess, who, in very indistinct Hindustani wished them good-morning, and inquired if they had passed a pleasant night.

Lucy engaged her in conversation, but beyond a few nods or head shakings, she was not very communicative. She apologised for her difficulty in understanding what was said, explaining that she was not only very deaf, but that her knowledge of Hindustani such as the sahibs spoke was very limited—

she had used the local dialect for so long that she hardly knew any other.

"Ask her Lucy," put in Mary, "how long it is since she has been away."

"Forty years have I lived here without ever quitting the Fort," was the old lady's answer to Lucy's query.

"Forty years!" repeated Mary incredulously. "Have you never been away?"

"Never. I came as a bride from Achalgarh, and here I shall remain until I die—the great one has not been away for five years."

Mary was about to inquire how she occupied her time when a servant announced that Pertab Singh was without awaiting the Misses Sahiba in order to conduct them to their men-folk.

Lucy asked if he might be allowed to come in and permission being accorded, the servant went out to fetch him.

As he entered Mary thought how handsome he looked in his Indian clothes. Both girls thanked him for the arrangements he had made.

Pertab Singh laughed.

"You must see my rooms," he said; "they are quite English, and, as a rule I eat English food: sometimes I dine with my uncle, but I have got so accustomed to tables, chairs, forks and knives, that I find sitting on the ground and eating with my fingers very uncomfortable. Now you must come along with me, Miss Chapman, as your father is anxious to see you."

"I am sure Jack has expressed no similar desire about me, Mary," observed Lucy. "However, I will accompany you, as I don't think it would be quite proper for Pertab Singh to appear from the ladies' apartments with you unattended."

They followed Pertab Singh down the stairs and along sundry stuffy stone-flagged passages until they arrived at his suite, where, ensconced in comfortable

English saddle-back chairs, were seated the Resident, Major Chapman, and Captain Mead.

Mary kissed her father.

"Dad," she said, "I hope you are none the worse for your outing."

"Not in the least, Girlie; but we had a rare old fright about you two left alone with the servants. What a stroke of luck Pertab Singh being close at hand to rescue you." Then turning to Lucy, "I must thank you, Miss Mead, for your resourcefulness; what made you think of that beacon and flashing of the lights? We poor men-folk were destitute of ideas, even the Resident felt helpless—eh, Abercrombie?"

The latter screwing up his eyes in a comical way he had, admitted he had played the part of a thorough-going numbskull.

"All we did, Miss Mead, was to yearn for Mr. Yerks or an intelligent pet like Pertab's ugly lizard. However, as you have, so to speak, dominated the situation, please express your approval or the reverse of the following plans for extricating ourselves from our present predicament. Our car has foundered, yours nearly so; but the servants' is still a going concern. You seem pretty well off where you are, and our gallant host is more than anxious to retain two such charming ladies in his—a-hem—ladies' apartments, so we propose to proceed to Ghorapur in the servants' car. I will then send out two fresh cars with mechanics to repair the dud ones, and to bring in you, the luggage and the servants. How does that sound to your organizing instinct?"

Lucy thought a second:

"Yes, I approve, Sir Resident," she replied, "provided we can have our dressing cases which I hope you had the sense to retrieve from the servants' car. They contain things more important than razors. Moreover, the ladies' apartments—as you call them—here do not provide them."

"Very well. You shall have your cosmetics and what nots ; and we shall start as soon as we can. Your car will, I hope, be here to-morrow at 10 a.m."

Mary had been looking round the room. It was exactly like an undergraduate's at Oxford or Cambridge.

"How did you get all the stuff here," she inquired of Pertab.

"By camel, Miss Chapman. My uncle was quite convinced I had become the complete degenerate, and still shakes his old head whenever he comes in—not often. By the way, you have all got to meet him now : he told me he would be in the room where he receives his guests by about this hour."

"Of course, Pertab," acquiesced Mr. Abercrombie overhearing the remark, "we must pay our respects to your uncle if only to thank him for all the trouble he has taken—lead the way."

They crossed an untidy courtyard in which were congregated a medley of camels, milch buffalo and goats, and entered another wing of the old Fort by a low archway many feet thick. Here they waited whilst Pertab Singh apprised his uncle of their coming.

The party were then ushered into a large white-washed room, the floor of which was covered with the inevitable white cotton cloth. Half a dozen chairs had been dressed with meticulous precision at the farther end of the room. Standing close by them was a fragile old man, very simply attired in a flowing, faded mauve silk coat drawn in at the waist by a crimson kamabund in which was thrust a curved sword encased in a scabbard of embroidered crimson plush : on his head was a turban of delicate blue muslin : his beard was grey and brushed back from the point of the chin. His sunken eyes with their pin-point pupils revealed his addiction to opium.

As the Resident's party entered he straightened

himself, then came forward to receive his visitors with an old-world courtliness, as if the holding of a salon was an everyday occurrence.

The Resident, who had met the Thakur on two or three occasions when the latter had paid ceremonial visits to Ghorapur, held out his hand, and the old Chief took it in both of his, at the same time welcoming the party to his house. Then Pertab Singh introduced each of the others in turn. As the Thakur shook hands with Lucy and Mary he turned to Pertab Singh, saying something in the vernacular. Both girls noticed that Pertab, with difficulty suppressing a smile, hastened to the chairs to break up their alignment ; at the same time his uncle, by a gesture, indicated all to be seated.

Whilst Mr. Abercrombie and Jim Chapman engaged the old chieftain in conversation Captain Mead and the two girls chatted to Pertab Singh, until, at a sign from their host, three or four servants appeared carrying garlands and scent.

The Thakur insisted on garlanding his guests, selecting very pretty rose ones for the girls : the sprinkling of scent completed the little ceremony.

"Where do you grow flowers like these in such a wilderness, Pertab Singh ? " asked Mary.

"We have a garden of sorts, Miss Chapman ; if you will permit me to do so, I will show you over the demesne as soon as the Resident sahib has left."

"We'd love to, Pertab Singh—you must show us everything."

"I fear you will be greatly disappointed, Miss Chapman. Bheemgarh—that is the name of my house—is not exactly what you would describe as one of your 'Stately Homes of India.' "

The Resident prepared to take leave of his host, so all rose, and having said good-bye, withdrew.

The servants' old car, looking very much the worse for wear, was ready to start. During the early morning its more jaded parts had been stimu-

lated to action by substituting liberal potations of oil for the accretion of sand, so that when all had taken their places and Lucy Mead had flung them her last humorous injunction, the order to go ahead produced an astonishing display of vitality on the part of Mr. Henry Ford's production as it bumped its way over the débris and out through the crumbling archway.

"We'll fetch our topis, Pertab Singh," said Lucy, "then rejoin you here in the courtyard."

The two girls were soon back.

"Shall we go over the Fort or take a stroll round the . . . I think I had better designate them the sands," asked Pertab Singh, laughing.

"We'll do the sands, Pertab, before the sun tide rises any higher," replied Lucy Mead. "But first of all tell us what it was your uncle said when you introduced us—I saw you stifle a laugh—so out with it!"

"He wanted to know which of the men were your respective husbands."

"Well, what did you say before dashing off to arrange the chairs."

"I said you were close relatives."

"Did he believe you?"

"Of course. We Indians don't jest about matters of that kind like you do in England," replied Pertab Singh seriously.

They followed the tracks of the Ford through the gateway. The doors, made of massive wooden slabs bound together with iron straps, looked as if they had not moved on their hinges for centuries, encumbered as they were with sand and débris.

"Are they ever closed?" inquired Mary.

"Not since I can remember," replied Pertab. "I must ask my uncle. He can probably recollect the time when they were never open except when armed parties passed."

They went along the foot of the outer wall. Everywhere was noticeable the same advanced decay : everywhere sand, sand . . . millions of tons of it, as Pertab had described his possessions.

"What do you do with yourself all day?" inquired Mary.

"Ride, shoot a little, read, eat and sleep. I come here for a fortnight or so twice a year. Sometimes I ride out on business to one of my uncle's villages—there aren't many."

The familiar sound of oxen drawing water from a well was borne to the ears. The peculiar click of the tongue followed by the droning chant of the driver as he urged his beasts forward was unmistakable. It came from a walled enclosure which they were approaching.

"There is the garden, Miss Chapman," observed Pertab Singh. "My uncle made it thirty years ago when he discovered the spring. Your garlands came from this place. The gate is on the far side."

A medley of flowers, weeds and Indian vegetables met the eye ; the only pleasurable feature being the comparative greenness. A venerable Mali tottered towards them escorted on either side by two naked urchins bearing tiny bouquets. Pertab Singh tried to shoo them away, but Lucy laughingly beckoned them to advance. The two dots shyly came forward, and having surrendered their posies fled to the shelter of a grass hut near the well. The mummified Mali then produced two more bouquets which the girls accepted. Mary offered him a rupee, but it was refused, not disdainfully, but with that delicacy of gesture only seen in the East which places an offering above price.

Pertab Singh smiled.

"Imagine rejecting a fortune like that," he said. "I don't suppose the old fellow has handled a dozen silver rupees in his life."

They began to retrace their steps to the Fort, and

in doing so passed another walled enclosure where Pertab Singh kept his Ghors.

"I'd like to see how you train them," said Mary.

"You'll find it a very tedious business, Miss Chapman. We start them off when quite young by making them follow one already trained; but who trained the first one, or how he did it, I do not know. Their keeper, who looks rather like a lizard himself, brought me the old trained one you saw at work at Ghorapur: it trains the others. If you were staying here some time I could show you them at work, but it is not a very thrilling spectacle, although at times the pets indulge in a little mild rodeo when half way up an ascent which compels the brat who is following them, to exercise his atavistic faculties in clinging. The ghor is also musical, and when in a fit of sulks can, like snakes, be cajoled by a charmer's melody."

"If that's the case, although to look at them I can't really credit it," put in Mary laughing, "you might overcome their rodeo-like proclivities by attaching headphones connected by wires to a gramophone on the ground, and urge them upwards by suitable exhortations or by some martial strain like 'Onward, Christian Soldiers.'"

"I never thought of it, Miss Chapman," answered Pertab Singh with a humorous twinkle, "although I have tried a musician at the top of the wall. I must consult Yerks sahib. *Ghorns galloping to Gramophones* might make quite a useful headline for a poster.

"I think it's time we went in—before this jesting reaches too high a plane," interrupted Lucy.

Having passed the outer wall by a wicket, they began to make a tour of the Fort. It was a bewildering warren of squalid ill-lighted rooms and dirty passages. Not a vestige of embellishment existed. They went out on the battlements to view an expanse of desolation.

"My Sand Realm," explained Pertab waving his arm round the four points of the compass.

"Do you intend to live here when you inherit your kingdom, Pertab?" inquired Lucy, "for if you do, you will never, surely, in these days, find a woman like your aunt who will consent to the incarceration."

"I don't intend to live here, Miss Mead. But I can assure you that the matter of incarceration would present no difficulties. The purdah business won't die out in this part of the world until it is introduced in England. Of course I should modernise the place—not omitting a listening-in set—that accomplished, what matter the outside surroundings if you never go out. A dreadful existence, I admit, and the tyranny of a fashion set by the Mahometan conquerors; but the great ladies of this country wish it, and, although contrary to what you probably think, the custom would not prevail for an instant if the leaders of fashionable feminine society were against it. In every country woman reigns supreme: the character of a people is determined by their womenfolk. England rules India because the women of England rule England; not from the House of Commons, nor because they have the franchise, but because the mother's influence over the child being five times that of the father, by the time the latter thinks he can exert an influence, the child's character is already moulded. Our womenfolk are lacking in all those attributes which create strong characters such as Englishmen possess. But I see it is lunch time. Let us return to my rooms where I have ordered a meal to be served."

Quite a presentable table, generously equipped by an English firm, was laid ready. Two well turned out servants, obviously reared in a British Cantonment, waited on them.

The meal, although chiefly provided from tins, was good—even the coffee.

"My aunt and uncle must be scandalised at our lunching together like this. For two unmarried, or married ladies to sit down at table with a bachelor in his quarters is inconceivable ; and of course they know about it," observed Pertab Singh.

Both girls laughed.

"I am not so certain that your old friend Mrs. Grundy would not be deeply disturbed at the prospect," said Mary. "And of course she will hear of it too ; that is to say, sooner or later quite a lot of people will know about our adventure ; how you rescued us and carried us off to your Fort, Pertab—it will all come out with plenty of embroidery."

They chatted on for a little time, until Lucy Mead proposed an afternoon nap.

"I forgot to tell you, Miss Mead," announced Pertab Singh, "that whilst you have been out I have had your quarters re-arranged with some modern furniture. You will each find a separate room ready for you."

"What unnecessary trouble, Pertab Singh," replied Mary. "We could quite well have rubbed along as we were until to-morrow : really we prefer sharing a room, since it enables us to borrow one another's things. I suppose you have dismantled your rooms to do it."

"Perhaps," agreed Pertab Singh. "But far from being a trouble it gave the servants something to do for a change. If you like, the rooms can be re-arranged as they were while we lunch. Further, I hope you will honour me with your company this evening. I have ordered tea to be sent up at five."

Both girls thanked him saying they would be delighted to accept.

He conducted them to the entrance of the Zenana, and there he left them.

Lucy found she had the same room as before, only metamorphosed by an invasion of a florid type of

Tottenham Court Road wares, even including a brass bedstead.

Mary's room was a smaller apartment close by furnished in the same style.

Before lying down she tried one of the easy chairs which looked inviting and was enjoying its comfort when a servant entered with a note—it was from Pertab Singh. She wondered what he could be writing about, seeing they had only parted ten minutes. Tearing it open she read :—

“ DEAR MISS CHAPMAN,

Please forgive me if I intrude, but the Fates which sent you to my house seem propitious. Is it presumptuous on my part to ask you if you would receive me, if only for a few minutes, in order to speak to you alone.

Yours sincerely,
PERTAB SINGH.”

In an instant Mary grasped the significance of the separate apartments. She knew well that she ought not to accede to his request and was about to say ‘ No,’ when a knock was heard on the door. Thinking it was a domestic, she said in Hindustani :

“ Come in ! ”

Pertab Singh entered.

For a moment she thought of ordering him out, but somehow or other her lips refused to frame the words.

The servant who had brought the note, throwing her sari over her head, discreetly withdrew.

“ May I stay, Miss Chapman, or am I to consider myself dismissed ? ” he said deferentially.

Mary smiled.

“ You can stay just five minutes, Thakur Sahib. Please be seated.”

“ You have conferred on me a great honour, Miss Chapman. In your country I did not often enjoy

the privilege of conversing alone with ladies, and since I returned to India the opportunity of speaking with those I meet is rare indeed. Still rarer is the opportunity now so graciously accorded me of speaking to one for whom I entertain the highest regard. Is it beyond the bounds of possibility to hope that an acquaintanceship which started but a few weeks ago at Canauj can be merged into a close friendship, or even—" Here Pertab Singh hesitated, and then continued tremulously—" something infinitely more precious."

Mary began to feel uncomfortable. His courteous demeanour only emphasised the glowing passion. What reply could she make ? He was either paying her a compliment which most of her sex highly value, or, suggesting a degradation that she dismissed from her mind as an unworthy thought.

" Listen, Pertab Singh. We must let friendship—only friendship—mark the boundary. To allow you hope of anything further will spell misery for both of us. I could never for a moment reciprocate anything else. Write to me whenever you like : let your letters be a lasting link in the bond that is between us. I can say no more."

" Your friendship is an honour I shall always cherish, Miss Chapman," said Pertab Singh, rising. " If, as the years pass, you, the perfect one of my dreams, can bring yourself to pass beyond the boundary, you will find me ever ready. I can never marry a woman of this country."

" Don't be absurd, Pertab Singh ! You should certainly marry, and if necessary let my memory fade from your mind. I think you had better not write to me."

" What you suggest is impossible, Miss Chapman. It may be presumptuous of me to say so, but since my sojourn in England I have hoped to meet some English lady who, casting aside all colour prejudice, would consent to be my partner in life. I would be

prepared to throw over all my Indian ideas and so-called prejudices, accepting unreservedly, the customs of your countrymen if I could but realise my desire."

"Even to embracing the Christian religion, Pertab?"

"Yes. I can never, perhaps, be an ardent follower of any particular creed or doctrine, Miss Chapman, but I have made a careful study of most religious beliefs, in particular, the teachings of the Founder of Christianity. All religions strive after an unattainable ideal, especially the Christian one. Mankind at its best can only hope for an imperfect ascendancy over its baser instincts; Christianity, in its broadest sense, produces a less imperfect being than most of the other faiths. Perhaps you will allow that Christ was probably dark-skinned—I have seen a painting in which His Mother is depicted as a woman with a dark complexion. I have often thought that possibly His dream of a universal brotherhood was based on the fact that He came from that part of the world where one sees the blending of the white and dark races. He could see no reason why a colour prejudice should offer a barrier to His ideal. Would my acceptance of Christianity help to bridge the barrier that I feel separates us?"

"I am afraid not, Pertab, and I think your five minutes is more than expired."

Mary rose and held out her hand. Pertab Singh took it, trembling with emotion, and gently bowing his head touched her fingers with his lips. Then looking Mary full in the face he said:

"I will have the rooms rearranged as before: perhaps we had better cancel the dinner. I will give orders to serve it here. You can tell Miss Mead that I have been unexpectedly called away to a distant village. I shall be back in time to see you off. Farewell, Light of my Heart."

As soon as he was gone Mary tried to get some rest, but the events of the afternoon banished all powers of sleep. She tried to analyse her feelings towards Pertab Singh, but they were a mass of jangling confused contradictions. When tea came in she requested the servant to take it to Lucy's room and to say she would follow in a few minutes.

She found Lucy still lying on the bed.

"I've had a gorgeous snooze, Mary," Lucy remarked; "it was most considerate of Pertab separating us as he did, for had we been together we'd have gossiped the afternoon away."

"I felt it too hot to sleep without a punkah, Lucy."

"You miserable sybarite."

Mary ignored the remark, but mentioned that Pertab had been called away and that the dinner was off.

"He keeps you well posted of his movements, Mary," replied Lucy. "I feel quite jealous!"

"At Canauj you warned me against continuing the acquaintanceship, so why jealousy?"

"You need not treat me seriously, Mary. Besides I was right. But the fates have paid you a trick which no one could have foreseen. The man is head and ears in love with you, so it is just as well you have the redoubtable Miss Mead to guard you, otherwise I believe he'd abduct you."

"I'm sure he'd do nothing of the kind, Lucy—he's a gentleman, if nothing else."

"I am afraid it's a bad case, Mary. Tell me seriously, do you like him?"

"Yes, but only as a friend, Lucy, so don't be absurd. I am no longer a child: I have no intention of mating with a dark-skinned man, least of all with a Hindu."

"You are talking sound sense Mary, but why the emphasis on Hindu?"

"Because their customs are so abhorrent."

"What do you know of them? You have hardly been in the country four months."

"I've read *Mother India*."

"Well, what of it?" inquired Lucy disdainfully; "allowing for certain modern aspects, there is little in the book which we did not know already: a great deal of it covers the same ground as the Abbé Du Bois' work written a century ago, excerpts from which the author freely quotes."

"Then you don't think the book is fair comment?"

"It's statements of particulars are correct, but I do not consider the everyday morality of the Hindu masses is of such a low order as the general tone of the book would lead one to expect; in fact their morality would compare very favourably with that of many nations. The average Hindu wife is a pattern of rectitude—she dare not, as the author points out, be otherwise. The husband, even allowing for certain dispensations, is, on the whole, a decent minded man devoted to his children. Be he peasant, soldier, or artizan, his struggle for existence is so acute that he has neither the time nor the inclination to indulge himself to the extent suggested. With the well-to-do or aristocracy there is a tendency to excesses, but that is not unknown in other countries. I have lived behind the veil, and so I know what I am talking about."

"After all, are the criminal depravities of America any less deserving of censure than the sexual depravities of the Hindu religion. Is dame nature better served by bringing into the world two children who live to reproduce their kind, or eight children of whom only two survive to attain the same end. There must be some amazing tenacity of life associated with Hinduism to have enabled that vast community to have survived the buffetings of 2000 years. Will Western civilisation be able to point the finger of scorn at Hinduism 2000 years hence?"

"Don't allow that book to prejudice you against

Hindus. West should not mate with the East because their social systems are diametrically opposed to one another."

"I must own, Lucy, that your remarks have taken me by surprise."

"Why, Mary, I am not a pro-Indian at the expense of my own countrymen, nor do I subscribe to all this sloppy sentiment about Home Rule or the rights of self-determination, but I can't stick that type of Westerner for whom seeing *black* and seeing *red* are the same thing."

Further discussion was interrupted by the entry of a servant saying that if convenient to the Sahibas, the Rani would like to see them.

"I suppose we must appear enraptured, although I wanted to ask you a lot more questions," commented Mary.

"Just as well you couldn't," replied Lucy who, turning towards the domestic, requested her to convey to her mistress their compliments, and that they would be ready in a few minutes.

They found the Rani waiting for them in the outer room. To Lucy fell the onerous duty of making conversation which was chiefly about the journey to and from Achalgarh. Their hostess asked several questions about her native town.

"I have often asked my husband to take me there, but the journey is very fatiguing," she remarked.

"How would you travel?" inquired Mary through Lucy.

"In a curtained palanquin, without doubt. What other way would a purdah nashin lady travel?"

"Have you ever been in one of those conveyances we call motor cars?" asked Lucy Mead.

"No: I am too old for such contrivances, although I know that Indian ladies in the great cities often use them."

"Your nephew has been called away very suddenly," said Lucy.

"A look of considerable surprise appeared on the old lady's face.

"I did not know he had gone ; but he comes and goes without any warning. He is a good boy. Then, continuing in an undertone, she said, "but he is no longer one of us, as he mocks at all the old customs. Yet there is danger for him when he slights the Bramin priests by refusing to participate in the rites of his religion."

"Everyone thought your nephew's action when he threw the bomb out at Canauj very courageous," observed Lucy, anxious to keep the old lady interested, but to change the subject.

"That was nothing Sahiba. The Lord Sahib wrote to the Great One about it, asking if there was anything he could do. A reply was sent saying that we expected such deeds from our sons and no word of rewards needed mentioning."

Thus they talked on until the servants came to prepare the table for dinner, when the Rani, rising, wished them goodbye, as she would not be about when they left the next morning—a hint, explained Lucy, that our departure should not be prolonged.

The dinner was not very cheerful. Mary felt in an abstracted mood and wished she had not asked to share Lucy's room again ; but they found it already arranged to accommodate them.

Punctually at ten the next morning the two cars from Ghorapur arrived with Captain Mead in charge.

Pertab Singh, accompanied by his uncle, watched the loading and in bidding farewell the old man again garlanded the two girls.

CHAPTER XII

A BOAR HUNT AND A PROPOSAL

Ten days, a week, or even twenty-four hours often mark a great change in India's seasonal climate, and by the time the Chapmans had returned to Nadirpur the strident note of the Koel—more familiarly known as the brain-fever bird—was heralding the onset of the hot weather.

This maddening fugue betokens either acute discomfort or pleasurable leisure.

For the many it proclaims seven months forced seclusion in the stuffy superheated atmosphere of an hermetically sealed bungalow.

To the married man of small means it signified a period of great anxiety, either for the health of his family if they are compelled to remain in the plains or on account of monetary worries incidental to ruinous charges for passages home and accommodation in the hills.

To the sporting bachelor or those in affluent circumstances—comparatively few—there may be vouchsafed a period of leisure during which some favourite pastime, such as polo, pigsticking, or big game shooting, can be pursued without interruption; or the amenities offered by the greatest playground in the world—England—be thoroughly enjoyed.

To Mary it meant nothing but a disagreeable noise by a vermillion-eyed, repulsive looking crowlike bird.

The rapidly rising thermometer induced her to take to the saddle at the break of day. Sometimes Captain Greatorix was able to accompany her, but generally she went alone and unattended. Everyone

had begun to dine and sleep out of doors, a novel experience which she not only enjoyed but considered reasonable compensation for the long hours of imprisonment during the day. She loved the quiet dinner in the garden followed by a rubber of Bridge or an idle gossip in comfortable arm-chairs. She revelled in sleeping out under the starlit heavens ; even the half-awakening by the long drawn-out notes of *réveille* was redeemed by the subsequent lapse into a dreamy oblivion until the arrival of the morning tea.

The main topic of conversation concerned plans for the hot season. Whether to go or not to go, and if the former, where to go—home, Kashmir, the Himalayas, other hill resorts, big game shooting, pig-sticking.

Mrs. Chapman had definitely decided to patronize the local Hill Station on account of its cheapness and accessibility to her husband for week-end visits : only the question of accommodation remained : a nasty and expensive hotel : a nasty, but cheap, boarding-house, or the extravagance of a bungalow.

After mature consideration of his creditors' claims Major Chapman determined to have a bungalow on the principle that one may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a goat.

There were still a few weeks of cool nights before them, so it was decided to postpone the move until the heat became unbearable.

That popular hot weather pastime—pigsticking—had commenced, and one evening whilst at the Club, Captain Greatorix had suggested that Mary, along with one or two other Dianas, ought to see the sport.

" You may not be here for another season, and, as only a few stations now run tent clubs you may sail away home without ever seeing one of India's sporting attractions."

" Attractions ! " retorted Mary scornfully. " You men seem to consider that the only ones in this

world are those connected with killing something. Besides from what I have heard, pigsticking is a particularly cruel sport. Why do you want me to see it?"

Jack Greatorix evaded a direct reply. "Riding without an objective is very much the same as playing cards for love," he answered. "One must have an incentive, a fox, jack, or pig—the goal at polo. You are still a beginner at riding, consequently have not yet acquired the longing to pit your skill and endurance against others."

"Perhaps not," retaliated Mary. "At present I am content to pit my skill against that of my mount. When I acquire the longing to compete against my fellow creatures, it will be at polo or race-riding, neither of which involve the deliberate taking of life."

Jack Greatorix looked disappointed. He had taught her all she knew about riding and horses. She had been not only an apt pupil, but a pleasant companion. A considerable degree of familiarity, moreover, had sprung up between them. Latterly he had begun to want more than that. He recognised that her views on many matters were antagonistic to his own, a state of affairs which instinctively precluded any further advance in their intimacy.

Noticing his dejection and knowing how indebted she was to him for many pleasant hours, she decided to temporize.

"Don't look so glum," she said, relenting. "If you really think that my Indian education would be incomplete unless I were an eye-witness of this pork butcher business, I'll think it over and perhaps consent to put in an appearance at the Meet."

"Don't allow me to persuade you against your inclinations, but there happens to be a really good hunt next Sunday. If you decide to bury your scruples, I will motor you out : we'll have to start about six in the morning."

A hot night followed by a sunrise which portended a sultry day almost made Mary regret her promise to be an unwilling spectator of a day's sport with the Tent Club. Very early rising in the hot weather in India calls for the same effort as in England ; but whereas in the latter country the attraction to remain in bed is sleepiness engendered by cosy warmth in India the drowsiness is due to refreshing coolness. To get out of bed, enter the ovenlike atmosphere of the house and don garments which feel as if they had just been extracted from one of those sterilizing ovens, is a repulsive business. However it had to be done. Once up and dressed, she felt virtuously complacent, especially when the motor, gathering speed, forced the cool morning air against her face and limbs.

The car pulled up under a large Banyan tree. Close by, under another tree, was a table, and round it were seated a dozen or more sunburnt men in khaki taking chota Hazari. Scattered about were several small tents and numerous horses, syces, and orderlies with spears. Most of the sportsmen had hacked out over night.

" Can I get you some tea or coffee, Miss Chapman ? " inquired Captain Greatorix.

" No thanks. It's too hot," replied Mary.

" We'll be off soon so you won't have long to wait; I have Shylock ready for you."

Just then another car arrived and Mary recognised Mrs. Redmond—the wife of the veterinary surgeon. She was one of those wonderfully accomplished Irish horsewomen—a type rapidly becoming extinct—to whom sport in any form, but particularly saddle sport, was an irresistible attraction. Sunburnt, plump and cheerful, she radiated good nature, which, tempered by Hibernian wit, at once admitted her to the privilege of being a *character*.

She greeted Mary with the remark :

" I've come at Jack Greatorix' request to look

after ye. Pigsticking is the grandest sport next to fox-hunting in County Limerick : no, ye needn't be after tellin' me you don't like it—I've heard all about ye from Jack, I see the lads are mounting, so get out of that car and we'll mount."

Mrs. Redmond who rode side-saddle, was assisted up by Captain Greatorix, who then held Shylock whilst Mary mounted.

"I've put a big bit in his mouth, so he won't give any trouble," he said as he adjusted the stirrup leathers. "I must go off now in order to find out what heat I am in, also arrange about my horses."

The Secretary of the Tent Club came up and wishing them good morning, discussed the details of the first beat with Mrs. Redmond.

"There'll be three heats of four spears each," he said. "Two in front of the flanks of the line, one following. Your best place will be with the line ; you know where the flagmen will be posted : you can see one over there," indicating a tree amongst the topmost branches of which could be discerned a fluttering tattered red flag.

Another car arrived and from it descended Harold Lawrence, who seeing Mary, at once came up to inquire how she had liked her trip to Ghorapur.

"I am still out finishing my district tour," he added ; "as my camp is only a few miles off I came along to join in the sport. I hope to be in Nadirpur for good by the end of the week."

"We had a splendid time, Mr. Lawrence. I will tell you all about it later on, as I think we ought to be moving."

A walk of a quarter of a mile took them to where the line of beaters were drawn up ready to move forward along a nullah bordered by Babul bushes and Dhak trees. The latter abounded, their gorgeous deep salmon-coloured bloom making a vivid display which seemed to harmonise with the thick haze enveloping the landscape.

Mary thought it was very hot and said so, to which her companion replied :

" Sure ye never feel cool at this time of the year until ye be heated with a run."

" That means, I suppose," replied Mary laughing, " that I'll want a fur coat after, say, the third run."

" Maybe ye will, and a hot bath as well."

They placed themselves just behind the centre of the line. With them was Captain Greatorix' orderly, a stalwart young trooper of the Red Hussars. Behind them, about two hundred yards off stood the heat which was to take any quarry which broke back.

" Do ye see that big burly chap with the beard who looks like an Indian edition of a village blacksmith ? " remarked Mrs. Redmond, pointing out the person in question. " That's the Club Shikari, responsible for the day's sport. He has been at the job this thirty years and knows more about the pig than the pig do thimselves."

For the first half-mile nothing but a few hares or an odd partridge or two were put up. But, suddenly the beaters on Mary's right began to shout wildly, as a sounder of pig scuttling here and there, uncertain which way to go, became visible. Some of the beaters closed in towards the spot, leaving a considerable gap in the line, notwithstanding the vehement maledictions cast upon their ancestry by the enraged Shikari.

Mary forgot the temperature was 105 degrees in the shade and felt that inexpressible thrill which not only keeps men in the plains when they might go to the hills, but prolongs their bachelorhood.

Mrs. Redmond scanned the line from flank to flank with the practised eye of a fox-hunter. Suddenly she tapped Mary on the arm with her crop, then pointed to a clump of bushes only a few paces off, but now some yards behind the line just where the gap had been left by the unruly beaters.

At first Mary could see nothing. Then as she peered hard, she was able to make out a dark form.

"The old divil!" whispered Mrs. Redmond. "He'll be after squatting there till all is safe and unless the heat behind stumble on him he'll escape: but he has reckoned without Molly Redmond."

"Come here, me lad," she called to the orderly, who standing close by had also riveted his attention on the bush. "We'll work round to the far side of the bit of cover, put the brute back to the rear party, then follow and watch. If he comes out at us ye've got to keep him off with that spear of yours, but he won't."

She immediately carried out her plans, telling the orderly to beat the bushes with his spear.

Mary heard a whuff-whuff, then away darted a huge grey boar, making straight for the spears.

As he appeared all three raised a shout, and the Shikari, viewing the quarry, stopped the beat, unfurled a red flag, and by waving it in the direction taken by the pig, signalled to all that a ridable boar was away.

Mrs. Redmond commenced to hum the well-known strain:

Over the fallow and over the level,
Through the Dhak Jungle we ride like the devil.

Then she turned to Mary:

"Now follow me: the going's good."

She broke into a steady gallop. Mary saw the party ahead hastily mount, then disappear over a rise. Mrs. Redmond raised the pace. As she topped the ground behind which the spears had disappeared, four men could be seen galloping all out, and ahead the big boar who looked as if he was having it all his own way.

By degrees one of the horsemen, however, began to overhaul him. Suddenly the latter made a sharp turn; his pursuer shooting past him; one of the other spears endeavoured to close. This time the

quarry turned the opposite way, thus compelling the hunters to check in order that they might change direction.

The going was getting bad, so Mrs. Redmond pulled up on an elevated bit of ground.

"We'll see the finish from here—if there is a finish," she remarked. "The boar is coming back and making for the jungle on the left of the line."

He passed within a few yards of Mary with Harold Lawrence close on his tracks, making a supreme effort to close. The boar seemed almost under the pony's muzzle when Lawrence, gripping his spear, leant forward in order to obtain a good thrust.

"Whuff, whuff," came from the brute as the steel went home.

The next thing Mary noticed was Lawrence brandishing a broken weapon.

"Let us gallop to that bit of high ground," said Mrs. Redmond, indicating with a vague wave of her arm another eminence from which they could watch events.

The boar seemed to be tiring when next viewed, but by clever jinking on difficult ground he kept himself clear of his pursuers. At last one of the riders, casting discretion to the winds, closed, getting home a fine thrust.

The plucky animal now turned on the hunters, and ignoring the one who had so sorely wounded him, unexpectedly charged the next nearest. The impact was terrific and the rider, taken unawares, rolled over.

The quarry had retreated to some bushes, when Lawrence who had now secured another weapon came up. After helping the fallen hunter to his feet a short consultation was held with the Shikari.

They were finding it impossible to ride over such broken ground without grave risk to the horses, and now decided to finish the affair on foot. Making their mounts over to a couple of beaters standing

by, therefore, the hunters closed in on the bushes harbouring the wounded animal.

With another "whuff, whuff," the gallant brute hurled himself to destruction against a spear point thus ending the chase.

"Isn't it a grand sport?" said Mrs. Redmond exultingly.

"It's just as cruel as I expected," replied Mary. "But I see what a fascination it must exercise over everyone. And, besides, it has this redeeming feature that the quarry may, directly, inflict a certain amount of damage on his pursuer."

"Sure ye are a queer girl. I'd never let such thoughts trouble me, but I agree with ye, I'd rather be a hunted boar than a fox with a murdering pack of hounds after me."

"No, I am not going to view the corpse, Mrs. Redmond," declared Mary as she noticed that her companion was about to move over to where the sportsmen were congregated about the kill.

"All right, me girl. I'll go along while you bide here. Maybe I'll bring you back the brush," she added laughing.

Mary dismounted. It was very hot and she wondered what the next move would be.

The question was answered by Harold Lawrence, who, making his blown mount over to his syce, came over to where she was standing:

"I've finished for the day," he said. "My nag is going short, and I haven't another mount. The beat will now go on as soon as Ghanni, the shikari, can re-organise it. What are you going to do?"

"I have had quite enough," replied Mary. "But as I am Captain Greatorix' guest I must await his pleasure. I do not want to spoil his morning's sport. I think I shall return to the road and take shelter under one of those fine trees until the show is over; but I must see what Mrs. Redmond has to say first."

"The sport has hardly begun," observed Lawrence. "Why not come to my camp which is only six miles down the road, and I'll send a message to Jack saying I've annexed you—he'll be furious, but it doesn't matter."

Mary thought a moment before replying. It seemed hardly fair on the long suffering Jack after all the trouble he had taken : on the other hand she had told him she did not want to come, nor could she see any reason why she should stay out in the awful heat any longer.

As she was cogitating on what to do Mrs. Redmond reappeared.

"'Tis a fine boar you speared, Mr. Lawrence," she exclaimed. "They tell me it measures thirty-four inches, and has a grand pair of tushes which you've got to secure for Mary."

"I'd forgotten all about the *trophy*, Mrs. Redmond, although not about Miss Chapman, who thinks it is too hot to do any more, so with your permission I intend to carry her off to my camp, until the day's hunting is over," said Lawrence decisively.

Mrs. Redmond looked from one to the other inquisitively ; then burst out laughing.

"Sure, Jack Greatorix will be assassinating me if I agree to sich a scandalous proposal," she said. "But I daresay it's a trifle over warm for Mary, so I'll say she's taken bad with the headache and gone back to the camp with you ; if you care to abduct her from there ye can. But don't tell Molly Redmond. I am for seeing the day out, so I'll be off before ye can suggest any more indacencies."

When she was gone Harold Lawrence helped Mary to mount, then, walking beside her, headed for the road.

"Let's get some fluid refreshment before we do anything else," urged Lawrence. "I feel I could drink a well dry : I hope they haven't sent all the drinks out on the camel."

"Much the same here," replied Mary, "although I haven't done anything."

Lawrence called up a Khitmagar who was busy packing up and ordered two large iced sodas.

The liquids soon disappeared, to be followed by two more.

"Now what about my camp? I can run you there and back in the car."

Mary agreed, and a short run took them to a turning off the main road which led them to a grove of mango trees, where Lawrence had his camp. It was not luxurious, but boasted most of those conveniences which a paternal Government allows its superior officers when touring.

"We shall be cooler under the trees, Miss Chapman; the tents get so hot by this hour, and I have a really good punkah, swung from one of the branches, which will keep us cool. Would you like some breakfast? I can easily order some—it will be ready in twenty minutes' time—I intended having a snack off the camels, as I suppose you did?"

Mary declined the offer, appropriating a comfortable deck chair, whilst Lawrence ordered some cooling drinks and arranged for the punkah puller.

"This isn't a bad spot, Miss Chapman, as camps go—plenty of shade and water—but I move tomorrow. When are you going to the hills? Tell your father from me to get you and your mother off as soon as possible."

"Why such a hurry?" inquired Mary.

"There is trouble coming, and coming soon," replied Lawrence lowering his voice. "All these foolish half-baked concessions merely create an appetite for more. As we cannot give way on one or two fundamental points, the extremists intend to force our hands. I don't quite know what form it will take or when; but it is only a matter of a few weeks or possibly days. You have attended the last meeting of the Tent Club there will be for some

time. Quite between ourselves, my Chief is having an interview to-day with the Brigade Commander about the matter. There are so many people stirring up the villagers by circulating a lot of venomous rubbish about sport being obtained at the expense of the cultivator that our wretched Government have decided to stop all Meets."

"Is there any danger for you and others situated like you, Mr. Lawrence?"

"Yes, but I am very careful these days where I pitch my camp. Not only do I never have it near a village, but also I make all arrangements for a rapid retreat in the event of things getting too threatening. Personally I am not unpopular, but that will not save my skin once the word goes forth to do me in. In fact, these revolutionaries are rather partial to those Government officers who are liked. Anyhow, my advice is for all women and children to be in the hills as soon as possible in case anything does happen. You won't be able to get there once the trouble commences."

"About what hour do you think the day's sport will be over?" inquired Mary, changing the subject

"Noon. I told Jenkins, the honorary secretary, who was in my heat to cut out the afternoon programme—he wanted to beat a bit of country where the natives are all up against us—so when you feel revived I'll take you back to Jack Greatorix. Now tell me about your trip to Ghorapur; I hope the Abercrombies looked after you. What is this rumour I hear about you and another lady being carried off by the dashing scion of old Bheemgarh, to be locked up in his Zenana until rescued by the Resident and your anxious parent."

Mary recounted her experiences.

"You seem to have had a good run for your money," observed Lawrence. "How long shall we have to wait for your written version on the inner family life of Rajputana?"

"There won't be much to write about. The Zenanas of modern fiction are not, I fancy, to be found in the crumbling old residences of Thakurs in Rajputana—I can't speak for other parts of India. The old Bheemgarh couple live the same kind of uneventful existence which many a Scots laird leads in some remote Highland Glen. There may have been other ladies in the Zenana, but if there were I did not see any traces of them."

"You are right, Miss Chapman. There is more twaddle written about Zenana life than almost any other subject. A few notorious ones serve authors as a standard for all : the vast majority are a model of virtuous rectitude, bordering, as you suggest, on a blameless and aimless existence. Bheemgarh is, I should say, typical of countless respectable Hindu homes."

It was delightful this sipping of pleasantly cooled drinks under the swaying punkah whilst chatting together. Mary was comparing Harold Lawrence with other acquaintances of her's.

He might have risen from humble origin, she thought, but his features and bearing were infinitely more aristocratic than those of many another man, and his manners—often reminding her of Pertab Singh—unimpeachable. His vivacious countenance, and clean-cut six foot figure, she realised, were making a considerable impression on her mind.

She glanced at her watch.

"I think it is time you took me back," she remarked. "I don't want to keep Captain Greatorix waiting too long."

"Oh, Jack won't mind, although I dare say he'll be a bit peeved at my bringing you here—I expect he poured out his ill humour on Mrs. Redmond."

"Isn't she a scream?" exclaimed Mary. "And how wonderfully well she always seems to be. She tells me she has never been to the hills, as for one

thing she can't afford it, and another she would miss her riding."

"She'd probably get ill if she went. After all, it was not until the Railways were opened that people in this part of India could get away from the plains. There were many Mrs. Redmonds in days gone by, but now the average woman is so occupied with preserving appearances and participating in the usual round of gaieties that they overlook the best preservative of all—riding."

"But surely you do not advocate women remaining in the plains during the summer : I find the heat very trying already."

"Negotiating hot weather or any weather is merely a matter of determination," replied Lawrence. "If you make up your mind not to be oppressed by it, and in spite of the discomfort take healthy exercise like Mrs. Redmond, you will probably not suffer. She is always cheery and well because she makes up her mind to be so. Her husband is the same : he may not be a brilliant vet, but he'll always turn up smiling at any time to see a sick animal, which is a good deal more than can be said for the doctors. But it is time we were off."

Captain Greatorix was waiting for them when they arrived. Mary thought his demeanour towards Lawrence not very cordial, although the latter treated the affair in a jesting way by thanking him for bringing Mary to the Meet, and incidentally to his camp.

Everyone had departed with the exception of a servant or two gathering together their master's belongings. The sportsmen, finding the afternoon's hunt cut out, had hacked home. Mrs. Redmond had already departed in her car.

Mary changed to Greatorix' Sunbeam, and in a few minutes she and her companion were well on their way home.

" I have a nicely stocked tiffin basket, Miss Chapman ; as we will be passing close to a very pretty and well-shaded ravine before long, would you care to stop for a snack ? "

Mary detected a note of pleading in the suggestion, and feeling rather guilty about her disappearance to Lawrence's camp, decided to acquiesce.

" By all means. I feel quite famished," she replied. " Mr. Lawrence offered me some breakfast, but I felt too hot to eat any then."

The car having ran on a couple of miles, turned off along a country cart track that led down to, and across, a deep ravine—her companion evidently knew the country—in which ran a sparkling brook.

" I think that is the right spot," said Greatorix, stopping the car and getting out. Having helped Mary to alight he removed the cushions and tiffin basket, not omitting a box containing a large chunk of ice. They carried the things to the edge of the water where a clump of bamboos afforded perfect shade. The spot chosen was delightfully cool, as, except for a few hours in the evening, the sun's rays were cut off by the steep cliffs.

They chatted gaily about the morning's sport until the meal was over. Then suddenly Captain Greatorix got up on to his feet.

" I simply must speak out, Miss Chapman—Mary—do let me call you that for the moment. I love you and want you to marry me. Do say you will. I can give you everything you could wish for. I want you desperately, and have, ever since I met you at Canauj. Don't turn me down. I know it must seem to you very precipitate ; but your going off to Harold's camp this morning nearly drove me out of my mind. He and I are old pals, but I could not bear to think of his winning you. Do say you care for me a little bit. I know you are not much interested in the sort of life I lead, but don't you

think you could get to like it if I tried hard to meet you half way ? ”

He poured out the words in an almost incoherent torrent, as he stood over her.

“ Do sit down, Captain Greatorix,” she said, rather embarrassed. “ It agitates me to see you standing there like that. You have taken me by surprise. I am most awfully grateful to you for all you have done for me, but at present I don’t think I can marry you. For, to be quite frank, I do not care for you in the way I ought to if you were to be my husband.”

“ Is there nothing I can do to make you care for me ? ” broke in Jack Greatorix, “ or is it a case of someone else ? ”

“ There is no one else,” replied Mary. “ Nor do I think there is anything you could do to alter matters—you must continue to look upon me as a friend.”

“ I can’t ! I can’t, Mary,” almost wailed Greatorix. “ I will get a transfer to the Home Establishment ; I cannot continue to meet you as I do, except in the hope of being able to win you.”

“ That is a matter you must decide for yourself, Captain Greatorix ; I think we’d better be going.”

Both helped to re-pack the car.

Mary tried to talk of ordinary things, but her companion was evidently too oppressed by his sense of failure to respond, and they lapsed into a silence which was only broken when they parted at the Bungalow.

Mary felt depressed herself, as she entered the house. She called for the punkah to be pulled, then taking off her hot clothes, lay down on her bed, prepared to think things out, but overcome by drowsiness, soon fell asleep.

PART II

CHAPTER I

HARTAL

Réveille had just sounded, and Mary, half-awakened by the notes, was just dropping off to sleep again when she became aware that a motor bicycle was speeding its noisy way along the road leading past the gate of the bungalow. Wondering vaguely who could be about at such an early hour—a fancy dress dance at the Club having sent everyone to bed rather later than usual—she was trying to catch a glimpse of the rider, when to her astonishment, the machine began to slacken speed, and finally stopped at the gate. The rider had to dismount and having pushed aside the rickety contrivance that served to keep out itinerant buffalos, mounted and rode up to the porch.

She recognised him as Mr. Jenkins, the Adjutant of her father's Regiment. He felt in a dilemma. Major and Mrs. Chapman's mosquito curtained beds were about fifteen yards off in full view of the porch, whilst Mary occupied a more distant and secluded position behind some trellis work. As a bachelor, it was obvious he felt embarrassed. The nocturnal custodian of the house—the Chowkidar—who should have been about, was snoring vigorously under sundry borrowed garments on the back verandah.

The hooter came to the rescue : it was sounded with a studied persistency that compelled attention.

Major Chapman putting his head out from under the net, demanded with some acerbity what the

intruder wanted, at the same time anathematizing the fates which decreed that he must officiate as unpaid Commanding Officer for three months.

"I have an urgent message from the Brigade Major, sir, which I am to deliver verbally."

"Well, spit it out, my lad, and don't stand there like an ass."

"I am sorry, sir, but my instructions are confidential, can I speak to you apart?"

Mary chuckled. Her mother's coiffure, sadly in need of a boudoir cap, had been discreetly withdrawn beneath the scanty bed-clothes. Her father was obliged to disentangle himself from his bed and make his way to the porch uttering imprecations on all and sundry.

"Good morning, sir," said the disturber, saluting smartly as his dishevelled Commanding Officer in a pair of abbreviated shorts and a tattered pyjama coat, confronted him.

"Come inside, Jenkins," remarked Major Chapman, adding with a laugh, "your presence in such close proximity to the ladies' beds is causing embarrassment."

Then raising his voice he called to the Chowkidar. The latter slowly emerged from his night slumbers and shuffled forward.

"Call Yussaf and tell him to bring chota hazari at once. Now, Jenkins, what is it that brings you here at this infernal hour?"

Mary could just hear the muffled voices of her father and the Adjutant, but was quite unable to distinguish the conversation. For the past few days all kinds of rumours had been circulating through Nadirpur about impending strikes and disturbances, but beyond the usual idle cackle, nothing had actually happened to disturb the serenity of everyday life. Was the Adjutant's early arrival associated with some fresh developments, or was it merely due to one of those occasional episodes, like

running amok which from time to time startled the usual placid atmosphere of Regimental life.

A rattle of cups and saucers announced that tea had been brought to her father's room by Yussaf.

Mary glanced at her watch. It was but 6.30 she found. She had discarded tea since the weather had become so hot, had taken to cold water from a thermos bottle beside her bed instead. As she was about to pour out a glass, her mother, hastily rising, scudded indoors to the shelter of her room. Mary decided to stay out : the sun, just beginning to show above the purple hills to the East, would not trouble her for another half hour : there was a cool gentle breeze which must be enjoyed to the last.

Presently her father appeared in a dressing gown accompanied by the Adjutant.

"That's all right, Jenkins," she heard him say ; "you can bustle round to the British Officers and tell them I want all at the Mess by 8 a.m.—any kit will do. I also want the Subadar Major to come here as soon as possible ; I'd like a word with him before I meet the officers.

The motor bicycle had not gone more than a few yards when Mary called out.

"Come here, Dad."

Major Chapman made his way to his daughter saying :—"Feminine curiosity, I know," then raising a corner of the net he kissed Mary good morning.

"Sit down, Dad, and let's have a talk."

"The sun is getting a bit high, girlie. I think you ought to go in."

"Oh, never mind the sun, Dad, just throw that shawl over the net to keep the glare off."

Major Chapman, having complied, seated himself on the camp chair and lit a cigarette.

"What brought Mr. Jenkins here at this unholy hour, Dad ? State secrets, or merely to say that Dafadar Ram Singh's mother-in-law was so seriously

ill that she requires the son-in-law's presence at her bedside ? ”

“ There are no secrets in India, Mary ; what the General Staff think to-day is bazaar gup to-morrow. By breakfast time all Nadirpur will know what Jenkins came to see me about, so I may as well tell you now. The revolutionary party,” he went on, “ have declared a general hartal throughout India with the result that all the Indian personnel of the railways, postal and telegraphic services have struck work. In addition, there are great strikes in most of the mills and amongst the stevedores at the ports. It is obvious that the aim of the disloyal section is to make government impossible. Here, in Nadirpur, the entire Indian staff of the railway, which of course includes all the workers at the shops, have, with very few exceptions, struck work from this morning. A curious feature of the affair is that a large part of the strikers have commandeered a train or two, and have disappeared into the blue—so to speak—leaving the station and workshops practically empty. The postal peons and land telegraph people are also out, so, excepting the wireless station, we are completely cut off.

“ The situation is most serious, and I have just received orders that all the European families are to be warned that they must be ready to proceed to the Fort at 24 hours' notice, as with so many ill-conditioned people about, it will be impossible to afford protection to all the houses without scattering the troops. Further, it is quite possible that the Brigade, which is being placed on a war footing may be called away, leaving only sufficient troops to garrison the Fort.”

“ It all sounds very exciting, Dad, but how are the troops to go if the railway services are disorganised ? ”

“ Well, if they can't manage to open the railway line—and I don't see how the Authorities are to do

so for some time—I suppose we shall have to take to our feet ; anyhow you and your mother must pack up enough to carry on with : we'll have to leave a good deal behind, but the plate, such as it is, can go to the Fort strong room. The Treasury and Bank, with their securities, are to be moved in to-day."

" Do come in, Jim, and bring Mary with you," Mrs. Chapman called out from the verandah ; " the sun is quite hot."

" All right, Jane, we'll get a move on," he shouted back.

Then, in an undertone, " You and your mother must keep a stiff upper lip. You will both need all your courage and fortitude during the incarceration in that awful Fort at this season. Pray God, the Powers that be act swiftly ; three months' hot weather inside those baked walls will take a heavy toll. I must be off to dress now. You can tell your mother."

The remainder of the day was spent packing. It was not yet known how much baggage could be taken to the Fort, but Major Chapman was positive that the amount would be very limited—a couple of trunks apiece and the silver.

" After all, what does it matter, Jane," he said, " if we come out top dog and our goods and chattels are destroyed in the process, we'll be compensated. If we don't . . . well . . . it means ruin, the work-house instead of Ealing, or—

' There's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever—'

" Chapman," screamed his wife, and he stopped abruptly.

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The news which filtered in through the wireless station was far from reassuring. Complete paralysis of communication throughout India prevailed.

Acts of violence and sabotage were taking place. Europeans isolated at wayside stations were being exposed to insults and hardships ; in many cases the permanent way had been torn up and the smaller bridges destroyed.

The internal defence organization, depending as it did on the security of certain lines, was rendered abortive. If the strike could not be overcome, the troops could only be moved by road.

Until arrangements could be completed for the withdrawal of the families to the Fort, the troops were employed in guarding the houses and public buildings in Nadirpur. Martial Law, and with it discretionary powers to all local authorities to take such steps as were deemed advisable to secure life and property, had been proclaimed. Everyone not on duty at Nadirpur had to be in their houses between Retreat and Réveille. Sleeping and dining out of doors was prohibited.

Fortunately the servant class, probably overawed by the troops, seemed docile and loyal to their employers—only a few had absconded and left cantonments. The Indian troops, although obviously disturbed by the general restlessness occasioned by the *hartal*, seemed to regard it as only another phase of political propaganda instituted by sundry bad-marshes who hoped to gain a little notoriety and loot, should circumstances favour them.

The packing of the household goods proceeded feverishly as no one knew when the order might come to enter the portals of the dreaded Fort.

Towards noon on the second day following the declaration of *hartal* an aeroplane was seen circling over Nadirpur, finally alighting on one of the polo grounds. Everyone was in a state of subdued excitement as to the news or orders it brought. They had not long to wait. Within an hour of its arrival all Commanding Officers had been summoned to the Fort where Brigade headquarters had been estab-

lished. Major Chapman was only absent a short time. Mary met him on the verandah of their dismantled home. He looked stern, and gravely kissed her as he inquired where her mother was.

"You do look glum, Dad," she said cheerfully. "Mother is in the drawing-room making the best of Cursetjee's hired furniture,"

"Well, Jim," remarked Mrs. Chapman as her husband entered with Mary, "what's the news?"

"Very bad, Jane—all the women and children are to be moved to the Fort which is being provisioned for six months. A company of the Lomaxshires will garrison it whilst the rest of us are to march South to a place, not yet divulged, where a considerable force is being assembled. Either large numbers of Europeans in isolated stations have been killed or their whereabouts are unknown: a good many strikers have been shot in the Presidency capitals, where I am thankful to say some sort of control has been maintained; but the most sinister feature is the outbreaks all along the Frontier and the wholesale disaffection of millions of cultivators.

The Authorities believe that so far the internal disorders are concerned they will have the matter in hand in under a month, but I doubt it. It is an extraordinarily difficult task to stamp out this sort of thing. An organised Army can be fought, defeated, and dispersed, but it is no easy task to overcome the hostility of unarmed peasantry worked up into a state of frenzied hatred."

"That's enough, Jim," interrupted Mrs. Chapman. "When are we to go to the Fort?"

"Probably to-morrow evening, dear. The married families of the British troops commence going in to-morrow morning. All that can be done to make the place reasonably comfortable has been done, but your endurance will be tried to the utmost, I fear."

"What about a servant, Jim?"

"Only one may accompany you, and as a man will be the best, it's a question of the khidmagar or Yussaf. I thought of leaving the latter in charge of the house, and of telling him that if he can preserve things from damage, I'll make him a suitable reward."

"No, Jim. I am quite sure that the moment the troops march out the bungalows will be fired by the badmarshes from the city and railway. Let us have Yussaf; can you take the khidmagar with you, and if that reprobate of a chowkidar wants to show what he is worth, let him offer himself for immolation with the house."

"Very well, Jane, you can take Yussaf, and if the troops leave, I will appropriate Mahbub. You and Mary will have to share two small cubicles—I cannot call them rooms—in the north-eastern bastion which has been set aside for the families of Officers, all of whom will mess together."

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It was not until two days later that the order came for the Chapmans to move to the Fort. They had in the meantime been permitted to inspect their quarters—two small windowless, whitewashed recesses, the interiors of which were screened from view by muslin-lined bamboo chicks. Only the barest necessities in the way of furniture existed, nor was there room for more.

Mrs. Chapman shuddered when she saw the place, but Mary, looking upon the whole affair as an adventure, considered that things might easily have been worse. Electric light had been hastily installed by transferring one of the generators from the Power Station, so that apart from this boon a limited number of fans would, in all probability, be available. The heat inside the Fort was stifling, and the prospect of sleeping out seemed hardly likely to minimise the discomfort—the very air seemed stale and stagnant.

When the hour arrived for them to quit the bungalow, Mrs. Chapman quite broke down. For her, the wretched house meant home, and although the things left behind were of trifling value, she was deeply attached to many of them by reason of long years of usage. To Mary, this display of feeling was a revelation. Her mother had invariably anathematised the bungalow and most things in it ; yet the impending separation, which might after all be merely temporary, seemed to have occasioned overwhelming anguish.

Major Chapman accompanied them to the Fort. As they passed the sentry at the outer gate, Retreat sounded from the various quarter-guards throughout Nadirpur. The great gates, which had remained open to this hour, closed behind the party with an ominous clang.

Passing through the lower yard of the Fort into its central square, Mary noticed many children playing on the burnt up patches. " Poor little mites," she thought ; " it's well for them they are unable to realise what may be in store for them."

The luggage from the old Ford was brought in and deposited by the beds, Yussaf being left in charge to unpack whilst Mary and her parents repaired to the Mess. This institution had been furnished and equipped from the Club : indeed with all the officers and their families gathered about, one might have mistaken the assemblage for the usual evening gathering at the club.

From the mess they passed on to view the arrangements for the families of the Non-Commissioned Officers and men. Here again, the stripping of the various institutes had enabled the authorities to provide many amenities which included a particularly well-organised hospital.

" Except for the heat and discomfort due to so many being crowded into a confined space, I think we ought to rub along famously," remarked Mary.

" Yes," replied her father, " and if you can all avoid sickness, I don't think you need fear any other danger : the place bristles with machine guns which, with the Company left behind as garrison, would hold the place against thousands of the half-armed rabble that might like to capture you. I hear Major Gresson is to command, but who the other officers are, I don't know. For once, common sense has prevailed, the actual garrison having been carefully combed through so as to ensure fit and capable personnel, instead of a lot of invalids as was at first suggested."

" What do the authorities intend doing about the jail ? " interrupted Mrs. Chapman.

" What's put that idea into your head, Jane ? I don't think the point has been decided yet. I dare-say we'll release the inmates to prevent the other side claiming the credit for clemency. Poor devils of prisoners : they'll starve like domesticated canaries let loose : if given a choice they would plump for non-release ; I don't think you need have any apprehensions from that quarter, Jane."

They were now back at the Mess. A large number of husbands were present, who like Major Chapman had escorted their families to the Fort. Considering the circumstances, a note of cheerful optimism prevailed, everyone being of opinion that the trouble would soon blow over. Mrs. Day, who had already appointed herself a sort of Mother Superior, was convinced that the sojourn in the Fort was quite a temporary expedient, " to be on the safe side you know, and not take everything for granted as our forebears did in 1857," she was heard to say. Just as Major Chapman was about to take his departure, Mary heard a familiar voice at her elbow.

" Hello, Miss Chapman, how are you ? " it said. " Can you believe it, but I am one of those unfortunate wretches told off to garrison the Fort."

"How very complimentary you are, Mr. Ritchie!" said Mary turning towards the speaker; "you ought to be overwhelmed with pride at the grave responsibility imposed on you."

"Yes, it's an imposition all right, Miss Chapman, I don't say its villany isn't perhaps tempered by one or two agreeable protégées, but just imagine my feelings at being left behind like this."

"You must blame your reputation for brotherly disinterestedness, Mr. Ritchie, as regards your attitude towards *us*," scoffed Mary; "when do you take over these important duties?"

"In a day or so. My Company relieve the present one to-morrow or the next day."

"Well, till then, *au revoir* and bring a suitable text book for imparting military instruction to youthful feminines, Mr. Ritchie."

Mary kissed her father good-night and then accompanied by her mother, went to their quarters.

"The heat is awful," pronounced Mrs. Chapman as they entered the miniature sitting-room; "one fan will never keep us both cool at night."

"Never mind about me, Mother, I'll sleep up on the ramparts; Mrs. Redmond is going to arrange it all and keep me company."

"I don't like it, Mary, especially with these sentries moving about."

"Rubbish, Mother! You still think the British Private is a public danger where we women are concerned. Of all the places inside this Fort, it is the safest. Imagine the end of a man who was even suspected of molesting anyone; why there are enough women to make his existence insupportable!"

"Oh! how I wish we had followed Mr. Lawrence's advice and got to the Hills before all this trouble came upon us," wailed Mrs. Chapman.

"Well, we didn't, Mother, and father's creditors will be saved a lot of expense: you will, to use your own expression, have to start lumping it again."

Having tidied themselves up, they went over to the Mess—a long low narrow room which had at some time or other been used as a store, judging by the many hooks which projected from the white-washed walls. Without fans the place would have been unbearable.

Mary decided to sit next Mrs. Redmond in order to discuss the arrangements for sleeping out of doors.

“ You leave it all to me, Mary,” remarked the resourceful Molly ; “ my servant will fix up a camp bed for ye, net and all. So you needn’t be worrying about your own ” ; then turning to Mrs. Chapman, who inquired if the project would be not considered indiscreet, she replied, “ Sure, by the time we’ve been here a week all the women and children will be sleeping out; where else would you have them sleep in this heat, and guarded too by them fine young sentries.”

“ Perhaps you ought to keep your mother company, Miss Chapman,” put in Mrs. Day who was sitting just opposite and strongly disapproved of the idea of a young girl like Mary sleeping on a camp-bed on the rampart. “ Perhaps, as Mrs. Redmond suggests, we’ll all be sleeping out soon,” she added. “ I’ll talk it over with my husband.”

Mrs. Redmond nudged Mary. The Commissioner was to be included in the Fort Garrison along with those civilians, official and unofficial whose age or occupations rendered their presence with the troops of the mobile column unnecessary. Mrs. Day’s tone had been distinctly minatory, and Molly Redmond, detecting opposition, decided to take her own way but say no more ; so she adroitly diverted the conversation towards the repast, which every one agreed was particularly good considering the circumstances.

Thoroughly tired out by the heat and trials of the day, everybody retired early. Mary joined Mrs. Redmond to see the arrangements and whereabouts

of the beds. The spot chosen was at a re-entrant angle made by the walls, consequently any breeze which happened to be blowing, being caught as if it were in a funnel, eddied round and round through the old loopholes, thus setting up a pleasant draught about the beds placed just alongside them.

"We'll stake out a claim here, Mary," said Mrs. Redmond, as she discarded a wrap of notable colouring, "and I hope Mrs. Day may see us in the morning."

Mary found a stone stairway leading down to a point quite close to her quarters, so having seen to her mother's comfort and adjusted the fan, she undressed, joined Mrs. Redmond, and was soon fast asleep. Only once or twice during the night was she conscious of a step as the sentry made his rounds.

As usual, she was awakened by *Réveille*, not the far distant sounding one she had been accustomed to but by harsh brazen notes, amplified many times by the walls of the Fort. As her eyes wandered over the unfamiliar scene she noticed the Jack being broken at the flagstaff and gazing at the fluttering piece of bunting, she was vaguely conscious that this simple little ceremony of showing the national emblem between the hours of sunrise and sundown, endowed her—and probably many others—with sense of fortitude and comfort. Further, she suddenly recollected that India had no national emblem. A few Maharajahs possessed standards, but these were of purely personal significance. A flagless country denoted lack of national sentiment. Why hadn't some Indian patriot designed one? She wondered if Dr. Raymond in his researches had discovered whether the great empire of Asoka used a national banner.

Sleep seemed banished; so, pushing aside her net and gathering a wrap about her, Mary leaned her elbows on the parapet to watch the sun rise. What a wonderful sight it was! First, the soft glow

accompanied by every tint of yellow ; then as the fiery orb itself began to show above the horizon, the entire heavens became illuminated as if a huge piece of sodium were being consumed in a gigantic bunsen flame—at least so it appeared to Mary who had dabbled in elementary chemistry during her school days.

She was gazing thus when she heard the voice of Mrs. Redmond saying *chota hazari* was ready.

" Oh, I forgot to tell you," said Mary ; " I never take early morning tea in the hot weather—it makes me feel so sticky."

" Sure, it's iced coffee, Mary : I couldn't bring the boy up here with the tea things, could I ? We'll just have a cup and a biscuit apiece, then go down to take our place in the queue for the bath."

" Yes, I forgot that," put in Mary. " How mother will hate it : I wonder if Mrs. Day has reserved a tub for herself. Tell me, Mrs. Redmond, what's your private opinion of all this trouble ; do you think it will blow over pretty soon ? "

" Sure, I don't know, Mary ; it depends on so many ifs. For instance, if the powers that be try to mismanage it as they did the 1916 outbreak in Dublin, then we're in for a bad time of it : mind ye, I don't say auld Ireland hadn't its troubles and grievances, but the Government by its vacillation encouraged the badmarshes, until, as in this country, they kicked over the traces. There never was any call for the trouble, and all the high falluttin talk about the grand stroke of statesmanship which made Ireland anything but a free state is all rubbish because the necessity for such a contraption never existed until the daft politicians brought about the trouble. As far as Molly Redmond can see they are messing about much the same way out here with all this blarney about Home Rule and what not. We've just as much right in India as the Mahometans, or for the matter of that, as the Americans

in America, or the English in any of the colonies—grabbing the land wholesale from the poor natives. However, it's time we went down as I see there are a lot of folk about."

Mary found that her mother, thanks to the fan, had enjoyed a fairly comfortable night. "Remember, Mother, we've got to queue up for baths, so you had better come along with me."

"This will kill me, Mary, if it goes on for long ; I am too old to stand the hot weather under these conditions."

"We're much better off than our ancestors of the mutiny days, Mother. You will get accustomed to things perhaps. Then there are all these committees to keep one occupied—the children's welfare, men and women's hospital, entertainments—I heard Mrs. Day talking to the Matron of the hospital about them last night ; there is to be a meeting to-day at which I intend putting my name down for all of them."

CHAPTER II

NADIRPUR FORT BELEAGURED

At breakfast a notice was sent round asking all the lady members of the Mess to attend a meeting the same day at 11 a.m. Mrs. Day presided. A committee to manage the Mess was elected, with sub-committees in charge of the catering and amusements.

Ladies were selected to augment the nursing staff of the hospitals, to organise Boy Scouts and Girl Guide troops—in fact, to manage the affairs of the small but heterogeneous community by that system of self-government which marks out the Anglo-Saxon race from all others.

At the end of the conference, Mary found herself pledged to the duties of nurse and secretary for entertainments in the family hospital.

"I am sufficiently incompetent to be an efficient understudy and obey orders," she remarked to Mrs. Redmond, who had volunteered as a child welfare organiser and caterer in the same institution.

"Sure you can nurse the children I half kill with kindness and bad food, Mary. By the way, I hear we are to be assisted by those who aren't of the quality—as we say in auld Ireland. What grand ructions there'll be!"

"It will do us a lot of good," replied Mary, laughing.

"Will it, me girl? A precious lot of good remains after all the mixing up in the war—there's more class exclusiveness than iver there was."

"Well, a repetition of war conditions on a small scale inside these walls won't disturb the social fabric of India, whatever else happens," declared Mary.

The remainder of the morning was devoted to

settling, a process which in India is merely a preliminary step to repacking.

Just before tea, the company told off as garrison to the Fort, arrived. Mary recognised Bobby Ritchie at the head of his platoon as the latter marched through the central square on the way to its quarters. Then followed an avalanche of those come to bid farewell to their families and friends. The Brigade was to march at dawn the next day. The Mess was thronged at tea time, and, from the almost hilarious chatter which arose, one might have suspected that the troops were leaving for the annual cold weather camp of exercise.

Lawrence who was accompanying the Column had come for a few final words with the Commissioner. Having said goodbye to his chief, he sought out Mary.

"I've come to say goodbye, Miss Chapman, and hope we shall soon meet under more congenial circumstances."

"What's the latest news, Mr. Lawrence?" inquired Mary, ignoring his solicitous tone.

"Pretty bad; for the moment the whole country is in a state of hopeless confusion. The Frontier in a blaze, hoping, as usual, to profit by our difficulties: two or three of the Indian States oblivious sitting on the fence awaiting developments—one not far from here. Reinforcements are being sent from everywhere. Even the trunk roads are obstructed, and the only reliable means of communication are by air and wireless. I hear they are hurrying up the completion of two or three airships at home by means of which the authorities hope to relieve some of the more isolated stations, but I doubt whether they will be ready in time to be of much use.

"The trouble is not going to blow over as quickly as some people think; anyhow, it is a gigantic task pacifying large areas seething with discontent."

"You are not a harbinger of good news, Mr. Lawrence, are you?" interrupted Mary.

"No, I am not, Miss Chapman, nor a pessimist, but undue optimism may often lead to carelessness. Of this I am sure, however ; we shall pull through all right. The greater the confusion, the better for us. Although I can't as yet call this a war—in these parts, anyhow, it's going to be very like one, and all wars, after the first clash of arms, degenerate into a muddle. This one has started off with an unusual degree of confusion. As a nation we have got to where we are by our wonderful powers of overcoming muddles—that is why we won the Great War. Being pre-eminent in creating muddles, we are pre-eminent in negotiating them. First, we cause a muddle by our lack of foresight and unpreparedness ; then, having involved our opponents in the unforeseen mess, we proceed to clear things up, and thereby come out on top."

"Quite good, Mr. Lawrence. Am I to understand that the confusion is now sufficiently advanced to ensure our early success, or have things to get worse before they get better ? "

"I think things are at their worst, but I must say goodbye, Miss Chapman, and that reminds me, Jack Greatorix, whose squadron is patrolling, asked me to say *au revoir*—I offered myself as his deputy, seeing he was so deeply engaged."

Mary coloured slightly. How much did the speaker know ?

"Goodbye, Mr. Lawrence, and *bonne chance* to you all ; thank Captain Greatorix for me ; but tell me, what's your job with the Column ? It interests me to know what my friends are doing."

"Oh, Lord high executioner and general pacifier, Miss Chapman."

"They sound mutually helpful," suggested Mary, "especially if in the performance of the first you are discriminating."

"Quite so," agreed Lawrence, "the great art of pacifying lies in the extinction of those who possess

the non-pacific temperament." Then, seeing Major Chapman hovering near, Lawrence held out his hand to Mary.

"Once again goodbye and good luck."

Mary thought he held her hand just a fraction of a second longer than he need have done, but the moment he released it he turned and left her.

"Come outside, Mary," said her father; "I want a word with you."

Mary acquiesced.

"Your mother seems very downhearted," he said; "she seems to be all knocked up by the heat and imaginary worries. She is none too young to bear the burden of hot weather under these conditions. Try to be a little more companionable for my sake."

"All right, Dad, I'll do my best. What time do you march?"

"Six o'clock to-morrow morning: we won't pass the Fort. Old Meiklejohn thinks it better to slip away quietly, and personally I agree with him."

"Do the Brigade place any confidence in the old man, Dad?"

"We don't look upon him as a Foch, but with his good lady safely in England, he is a very different man from what he is when she rules the roost; also he has the sense and is indolent enough to let his Staff run things. We are quite a formidable force, you know, not that there will be anything to fight just at present. I've said goodbye to your mother, dear, and now it's your turn."

He kissed her. Mary accompanied him to the gate where were congregated most of the women whose menfolk had come to bid them farewell—many were standing on the battlements above the entrance, waving a last goodbye.

As her father passed through the wicket, he turned his face slightly towards her and she noticed how strained a look had suddenly crept into a coun-

tenance which only a moment before had seemed so cheerful.

Turning back to seek out her mother, she almost collided with Bobby Ritchie.

"Good evening, Miss Chapman," he said saluting. "I have come down to get all these good people back to their quarters. As long as they remain here, their menfolk keep hanging about outside instead of returning to their units."

"Well, I won't embarrass you, Mr. Ritchie."

"Oh, you're all right; by the way, there'll be no sleeping out on the ramparts behind breezy loopholes after to-night; some evilly disposed person might take a pot shot at you. The Commandant is allotting sleeping out areas, which, if not quite so cool, will be more healthy."

"Thanks, Mr. Ritchie, for your anti-post tip. Good-night."

Mary found her mother lying on her bed; she'd evidently been having a good cry.

"Buck up, Mother; you mustn't give way like this. Dad told me to look after you, and of course I shall."

"I know you will, Mary, but I have a premonition that something horrible and unexpected will happen."

"But why, Mother? You must banish such thoughts from your mind. Everyone seemed quite cheerful and Mr. Lawrence thinks matters will soon mend."

"That's only a pose, Mary, which all the men put on to cheer us up: I am sure things are much worse than they say."

"There you are again, Mother, conjuring up all kinds of pessimistic ideas. I will go to the Mess and get you a good pick-me-up: you'll feel better then."

In a few minutes Mary returned bringing with her a well iced beverage recommended by Mrs. Redmond.

"Now drink this up, then get ready for dinner: it is one of Mrs. Redmond's most alluring cocktails."

Mrs. Chapman slowly sipped the drink, remarking how delicious it tasted, and what a wonderful woman Mrs. Redmond was.

"You ought to have seen her in the children's playground this evening, Mother; the mournful parents were galvanised into merriment by the laughter and cheerfulness of the kiddies." Then changing the subject she continued, "the authorities don't like my sleeping-out place so I shall make Yussaf put my bed just beyond the door of this little room. That will leave you the fan again. It is still quite cool out of doors even down here."

Early the next morning many were about in the hopes of catching a glimpse of the troops, but only by the distant rumble of the Artillery and baggage trains on the move could anyone in the Fort have suspected the garrison of Nadirpur had left. Yes, certain natives put in an appearance outside the walls—at a discreet distance—shaking their fists and shouting imprecations.

The beleaguerment had commenced.

Everyone began to investigate the nature of the responsibilities they had accepted so lightheartedly. In her capacity as a nurse, Mary found she had to attend lectures and work in the family hospital wards. She could see that the hours would be long, and the work increasingly arduous. There were already a good many more cases than usual due to the move to the hills having been stopped: further, it was obvious that as the hot weather advanced, the admissions would soon exceed the discharges, which, for the moment, were about equal. There was no scope for originality here, just slaving hard work, but her other self-imposed task, namely, organising amusements, offered prospects of a less exacting nature, removed as they were from the domineering influence of doctors, matron and the trained nursing staff.

There was a small committee comprising five

members, two being sergeants' wives, by name Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Jones. Mary, in making their acquaintance was struck by the singular likeness between the former and Bobbie Ritchie ; so marked was this resemblance that she decided to nickname her Mrs. Bobbie, and between the two sprang up a friendship which, in course of time, was to ripen to an intimacy with fateful consequences to both.

About noon a rumour spread that several fires had been noticed in that part of the Cantonment out of range from the Fort, and before long it was evident that the now uncontrolled rabble from the city had begun its work of pillage accompanied by incendiarism.

"Let them do their worst as quickly as possible," was the consensus of opinion.

Towards sunset a huge conflagration broke out at the Commissariat rick yards, the flames leaping up high enough to be visible above the ramparts of the Fort.

"The fools haven't even the sense to preserve the stuff for their own use," remarked the Commissioner after dinner. "It's quite evident they recognise their ultimate defeat."

"Sure, it will settle the housing problem," put in Mrs. Redmond ; "they can't leave us in this place after we are relieved. Half the houses were only fit for burning this fifty year past."

"You forget the possibility of tents, Mrs. Redmond," remarked the Commissioner, smiling derisively.

"Unless they keep the troops runnin' about in the trains all day as they did during the war, there won't be enough tents to hold the army," retorted Mrs. Redmond.

During the night some firearms of doubtful precision were discharged at the Fort, and the wisdom of the Commandant's order in placing the ramparts out of bounds for all but the fighting troops whose duties took them there became evident.

CHAPTER III

A V.C. INCIDENT

Everyone had settled down to do their bit. In spite of the increasing heat, games of all kinds were indulged in, so far as the limited space permitted. The two tennis courts were crowded morning and evening, whilst hockey and even football matches took place daily.

Mary soon discovered that Mrs. Roberts was not only an indefatigable worker, but gifted with a genius for organisation. The hospital evening concerts, at first held just outside the building and restricted to an audience composed of convalescents, soon became a bi-weekly function to which the whole garrison crowded.

Mrs. Roberts' powers of discovering dormant talent and forcing it to the footlights was conspicuous. Every moment Mary could spare from her duties in the wards was spent with her. Each individual's gifts having been appraised, they were then exploited for the entertainment of the non-talented. Mrs. Redmond was roped in for her topical anecdotes, which, replete with inimitable Hibernianisms always acted as a great draw. Thus in one of her many sallies, she asked of the audience, "Why was Nadirpur?" No answer being forthcoming she supplied the answer, "Sure, because of its wireless."

The information which filtered through by wireless was meagre and not reassuring. It was believed that matters were improving. In the extreme South the population, normally very docile, was beginning to regret the acute discomforts it had to endure.

The British and Eurasian elements of the country police had disappeared ; the Indian personnel having in many cases joined the malcontents, or seizing control of the jails, were holding them as forts from which they sallied forth for plunder accompanied by the prisoners whom they had organised into armed bands.

The position along the North-West Frontier was critical, the garrisons just being able to hold their own.

Various flying columns were hastily being improvised to restore order and open communications. Reinforcements were already arriving at the ports. In addition to the wireless a certain amount of local information was forthcoming from spies.

About noon on the fifteenth day of the beleaguerment the hum of an approaching aeroplane was heard. In spite of the heat which was not only intense but accompanied by signs of an approaching dust storm, nearly everyone rushed out to watch the machine as it circled round at a considerable height. Did it intend to land ? There was no suitable place near the Fort whilst the parade and polo grounds were more than a mile distant.

An N.C.O. with some men appeared, ordering everyone off the square. The 'plane would not land but intended to drop a bag of letters and despatches.

Mary noticed some detachments of the troops being moved to certain points on the ramparts ; as soon as they were in position, the 'plane began to descend. When about 500 feet from the ground someone in the 'plane could be discerned manipulating a bag into position, evidently with the object of dropping it.

Suddenly a burst of firing broke out from some point outside the Fort. Almost at the same time Mary noticed the bag fall, and to her dismay it evidently landed somewhere beyond the walls—how far she could not say. Simultaneously the Fort and

Machine guns opened fire making a deafening din. The aeroplane ceased circling, making straight for some point in the opposite direction from which had come the bullets, and soon disappeared.

A rumour spread that the man responsible for releasing the bag had been hit, with the result that the bag was lying some three hundred yards distant from the Fort.

To complicate matters the long expected storm was evidently approaching. Far away behind the fringe of low hills surrounding Nadirpur a vast cloud bank could be seen gathering, indicating the proximity of a dust storm the duration of which might extend to several hours, during which time the atmosphere would acquire an opaqueness eclipsing any London fog.

If the bag could not be retrieved at once anything might happen to it in the darkness and confusion attending the storm. There was no time to organise a sortie in force ; the best chance of recovering it lay in instant action.

Lt. Ritchie with the Commandant's approval, volunteered to fetch it. He selected two men to accompany him.

As the bag had fallen on that side of the Fort remote from the entrance, it became necessary, in order to avoid making a detour over exposed ground, to cross the ditch, climb the counter scarpe, then make a dash for the bag lying a few hundred feet from the walls. Whilst the necessary preparations were hastily being improvised, some Indians were noticed stealthily worming their way towards the bag. They were driven off by the machine guns.

Ritchie, his companions, and a ladder were lowered into the ditch by ropes out of sight of any possible enemy. Then the ladder having been placed in position on the opposite side of the ditch the party climbed up ; when, at a signal from their leader, they raced towards the bag.

Immediately their mission became apparent, fire was opened on them from various buildings situate about eight hundred yards from the Fort—evidently the locality from which the shots aimed at the aeroplane had come.

The Fort replied, but the enemy, concealed in good cover, were not silenced.

One of the party was seen to fall just as the objective was reached. The fire from the Fort garrison rose to a continuous roar in the hope of affording protection to the gallant trio.

Someone else went down, apparently hit, and the enterprise seemed in imminent peril of being a ghastly tragedy. The Commandant had just decided on a sortie in force, when the storm mercifully broke. In a second the landscape was blotted out by a cloud of dust many feet high. No smoke screen could have been more effective. The rolling of the thunder and roaring of the wind mingling with the firing created a sense of indescribable confusion.

At the approach of the storm Mary had gone back to the hospital to assist with the closing of the windows and had therefore not been an eyewitness to the events narrated above. She was thus occupied when an orderly entered with a note for the Matron, who was busy supervising. Mary saw her read it and overheard the words, "Poor b6y, what bad luck!" then turning to the orderly, the Matron said: "Tell the Commandant that I have received his note; say everything is ready."

It so happened that the officers' ward was located in a wing of the Family Hospital. For the moment it was empty. The Matron turning to Mary, remarked, "I am afraid Mr. Ritchie has been hit; they are bringing him in here; come with me whilst I see that everything is in order."

Mary gave a start when she heard the Matron's words. *Bobbie hit!* That may mean anything.

The news made her tremble all over, but following the Matron she passed into the ward which was to receive him. In a few minutes everything was ready. To attempt to remove the dust whilst the storm was still raging was a useless proceeding ; but the bed, tables, clean water, and dressings were put ready.

It seemed a long time before steps were heard approaching. Mary braced herself for a shock. The Matron opened the door. Outside were four men carrying a stretcher accompanied by one of the doctors.

" Badly hit, I am afraid, but alive," remarked the latter to the Matron ; " I shall want Sister Eridge and one V.A.D. for night duty " ; then noticing Mary, he added, " I see you have anticipated my wishes."

" I am afraid not, Captain Edwards," replied the Matron, " Miss Chapman will be required elsewhere : I will detail another."

The stretcher was put down beside the bed.

Mary was horrified when she saw the blood soaked garments and waxen features of Bobby. The room began to spin round her.

" Switch the fan on, please, Miss Chapman ; then call two orderlies," ordered the doctor, whose crisp commanding tone rescued her from fainting.

She reeled towards the switch, pressed it, then went out in search for the men, thankful to escape from the room. She almost cannoned into them as they hastened towards the scene, and having satisfied herself that they were answering the summons of the doctor, she decided to go over to the Mess for a pick-me-up.

The storm was still raging so violently that it was with the utmost difficulty she was able to thread her way past the different buildings.

The Mess was unusually full, everyone not having any particular duty to perform having gravitated

there when the storm broke. Mrs. Redmond was talking to Mrs. Chapman when Mary entered.

"Where have you been, Mary?" inquired her mother; then noticing the pallor and dishevelled condition of her daughter, added, "You look ill, dear. Sit down and let Mrs. Redmond order one of her reviving drinks."

Mary laughed.

"It's just what I've come for," she said; "I have been cleaning up the hospital where the dust, heat, and all this firing have thoroughly rattled me; now tell me the news, Mrs. Redmond."

"Sure, they got the bag in all right, Mary; the Commandant with the Commissioner are turning out the contents. There's a trifle of a mail in, I hear, but its recovery cost us three fine lads, one of whom won't last long. If it hadn't been for the storm, they'd all have been dead this half hour ago. Them dirty blackguards of niggers thought they'd get the despatches, but Mr. Ritchie was one too many for them. Did ye hear how he was? It's one of the lads who went out with him who's done for, so I hear."

"No, I did not hear Captain Edwards pronounce any opinion," replied Mary, "but from the momentary glimpse I got of Mr. Ritchie, he looked rather bad; however, I suppose we shall hear before long."

Then changing the subject, she continued, "What a dreadful storm, Mother! How long do you think it will last?"

"It's moderating now, Mary. We always get two or three like this every hot weather: the air will be much cooler when it is over."

"I much prefer the murky stillness of a London fog. This tornado of hot dust is unendurable: what torments the people of Pompeii must have suffered!" remarked Mary despondently.

The conversation was interrupted by Mr. Day, followed by an orderly carrying a tray of letters.

Several persons at once crowded towards the Commissioner, who, waving them back, rapped a few times on one of the tables in order to gain a hearing.

" I just want to say that I have brought in here with me a few letters which were included with the despatches. I think you are all aware of the very gallant action of Mr. Ritchie and one or two others who risked their lives in order to retrieve the bag. I am sorry to inform you that one poor chap has been mortally wounded. I won't say any more just now except that the post will, after being sorted, be placed on the table, so I beg you to allow the orderly to finish his task unmolested ; I hope to be able to tell you more by dinner time."

The storm blew itself out by sunset, leaving behind it a refreshing coolness, but everything was so caked in dust that all those available were turned on to clean up. Mary went to her ward to do her share and meeting the Matron inquired how the wounded were doing. " One poor man is dead, Miss Chapman, Mr. Ritchie is severely, but not dangerously, wounded in the thigh, whilst the third one has luckily escaped with only a scratch. Mr. Ritchie has rallied wonderfully considering what a severe hemorrhage he has had."

Her worst fears dispelled, Mary set about her task with a vigour that surprised her—she had felt so listless and weary only a few minutes before that the very idea of cleaning anything had been abhorrent. In under an hour she had worked wonders, but decided that the final touch must await daylight.

Dinner, which, as a rule, created a sense of cheerfulness, seemed to have the opposite effect. The Commissioner, who had not been present, joined his wife just as the meal was ending. Since everyone knew he intended to make a pronouncement of some sort, his appearance was marked by an expectant silence, a silence which he acknowledged by rising from his chair.

"The news is grave," he said. "Owing to the disturbed state of this part of the country, no attempt is being made to open the line through Nadirpur. Consequently all hope of relief in under a month is out of the question. In the meanwhile, we may have to bear the anxiety of a siege involving a considerable degree of—shall I say—liveliness.

"The Maharajah of Mundapur, who has at his disposal a considerable force of semi-trained levies which include some obsolete artillery, is believed to be marching on Nadirpur. His actual intentions are a matter of conjecture, but he has given out that he is moving to our relief. I am informed, however, that he is merely awaiting events. If he thinks matters are going against the British, his so-called relief will be a summons of capitulation: on the other hand, he may at the last moment decide to hedge, and act as a relief in so far as permitting us to revictual ourselves from the surrounding country.

"I make this statement in order to dispel rumours. Our countrymen are fighting for their lives on the Frontier; and until communication from the ports is fully re-established matters must remain in a critical state.

"It may interest you to know that the man whose duty it was to drop the bag inside the Fort was hit in the arm with the consequences you all know. The pilot, seeing the storm was so close, and that he could do nothing to render assistance, made off, but sent us a message explaining the mishap.

"The young soldier who so gallantly sacrificed his life in helping Mr. Ritchie to recover the bag will be buried quietly very early to-morrow morning. The usual ceremonies connected with a military funeral will not be observed. Mr. Ritchie and the other wounded man are doing well. It is my wish that there be no cessation of the recreations and amusements."

CHAPTER IV

AN OFFER OF SUCCOUR AND AN EARTHQUAKE

Bobby Ritchie, after his wonderful rally from the shock of his wound, experienced a severe relapse. Like most wounds in the tropics, trivial or severe, his refused to heal. It became septic and a severe fever supervened, accompanied by delirium which for some days occasioned great anxiety.

Since his admission to hospital Mary had not seen him—all visitors being rigidly excluded—but she knew of his condition through the doctors and matron.

When finally he succeeded in shaking off the fever and was sufficiently recovered to recognise those who were attending him, he suddenly remembered that Mary worked in the same hospital and asked if he might see her.

"Certainly, Mr. Ritchie," replied the matron to whom he made the request, "but not until the doctor thinks you are well enough to see visitors."

"But you surely don't class Miss Chapman as an ordinary visitor, Matron, she's part of the nursing staff," expostulated Bobby.

"I am afraid the doctor will consider as a visitor anyone whose duty does not bring her here, Mr. Ritchie, but I will see what can be done."

"Miss Chapman is an old friend," urged Bobby ; "and, besides, I know she works here, so surely the ordinary formalities do not apply ; of course, if she would rather not come, that is another matter, but I think a visit from her would do me good."

The matron remembered that once upon a time she had been a young woman ; she recalled Mary's

concern when the patient was first brought in, also many subsequent inquiries. Feminine-like she already pictured a romance. She therefore inwardly decided to admit Mary without any reference to the doctor.

The next morning, meeting Mary on her rounds, she suggested that as Mr. Ritchie was now out of danger perhaps he might like to see some of his friends.

"I know you are both more than ordinary acquaintances, Miss Chapman," explained the matron, "and thinking it would cheer him up to see some of his friends, I thought I would begin with you as your training here ensures discretion."

Mary thought she detected a significant note in the matron's unexpected invitation and wondered if Bobby had been making disclosures during his delirium. Ever since the episode on the river she had noticed a subtle change in his attitude towards her, his boyish ingenuousness having given place to a courteous reserve.

"Thank you, Matron : if you think it would benefit Mr. Ritchie I shall certainly avail myself of your suggestion."

"I think," observed the matron with just a suspicion of a twinkle in her usually cold grey eyes, "that it would do him a lot of good, but only five minutes, Miss Chapman, to begin with, please."

"Very well, Matron ; when I have finished here I will look in for a minute or two ; thank you ever so much for asking me to do so."

Half an hour afterwards Mary knocked at the door of Bobby's room. She heard the 'come in' uttered in a bored tone as if the speaker anticipated the entry of one of the usual staff.

"Good gracious, Miss Chapman," ejaculated Bobby, "you don't mean to say that tyrant of a matron has actually sent you in ? After all her hot air about doctor's permission, etc. !"

Mary laughed.

"One question deserves another, Mr. Ritchie," she said. "Did you ask the matron if I might see you?"

Realising that he had given the show away, so to speak, the colour mounted to his pale cheeks.

"Well, I suppose I must admit that I did suggest it; wasn't it a good suggestion too? I am bored stiff with the washing, pulse-taking, temperature-charting cohort that hourly disturbs me. Now just sit down on the bed and we'll have a good talk."

"Visitors must not sit on the patients' beds, Mr. Ritchie, especially if they happen to be members of the nursing staff; I can only stay five minutes."

"Five minutes!" snorted Bobby indignantly. "What rubbish! You've got to talk to me for an hour; three minutes have already gone. Why don't they put you on duty here instead of that owl, Miss Lukin; I'll talk to the doctor when next I see him."

"For goodness sake, don't, Mr. Ritchie, unless you want no more visits from me. How are you? You look awfully pulled down."

"I am getting along famously now," declared Bobby; "if only they would vary the menu both as regards food and the people I see, I believe I should be on my feet again in a week's time. Tell me the news. How is Mrs. Redmond? You must persuade them to let her come along too. I hope your mother is bearing the heat and discomfort," he added as an afterthought.

"The five minutes are up," put in Mary; "but I will come again to-morrow to stay a little longer perhaps; also see what can be done about Mrs. Redmond. Now *au revoir*!"

Bobby held out his hand.

"A silly convention, I know," he said, "but as the Yankees say 'shake'; it will do me good."

Mary took his hand. It seemed very limp and feeble compared to the vigorous handgrip of Bobby in full health. As she went out, she encountered in the passage the matron, who was about to make some remark, when Bobby shouted lustily.

"Miss Chapman, I have forgotten something." The matron, smiling to Mary, passed into the room.

"Oh damn!" murmured Bobby, seeing who it was.

"Not very polite, Mr. Ritchie," demurred the matron, "but nevertheless a sign of returning animation; is it your illness you have forgotten?"

"Sorry, Matron, but I believe you are an understanding old thing after all. Thanks so much for letting Miss Chapman come."

"You must understand, young man, that matrons are never old things in their hospital even if at times they are understanding."

Bobby laughed.

"All right, Matron, it shan't occur again."

From now on Mary's visits became a regular daily feature with obviously beneficial effect on the patient. Draughts and other games were indulged in. The wound healed up, but the injured limb, owing to a damaged nerve, remained paralysed.

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The beleaguerment dragged on its monotonous course. As the thermometer steadily recorded higher and higher temperatures so the health of the garrison deteriorated. The hospitals were becoming inconveniently crowded whilst several deaths cast a gloom over everyone. A real siege involving active measures of defence or even sorties would have been more endurable than this deadly inactivity.

Mrs. Chapman, in spite of Mary's assiduous care seemed to have lapsed into a state of complete apathy, spending most of her time lying on her bed under a fan.

Mary often wondered what would happen if the electric power suddenly came to an end. Not only her mother, but the greater part of the garrison relied upon it for sleep. Fortunately, they were spared those epidemics, which as a rule play havoc with beleaguered Indian garrisons.

One morning they awoke to hear that the Rajah of Mundapur, together with his troops, having arrived the evening before in the vicinity of Nadirpur had sent envoys to the Commissioner soliciting an interview. Everyone was agog to know what the answer would be. When it was known that Mr. Day had agreed to a ceremonial meeting the next day outside the main entrance to the Fort, speculation was rife as to what the Rajah wanted. Tongues wagged incessantly in their efforts to answer the question. Long before 8 a.m. the next morning, at which hour the meeting was to take place, the entire garrison was in a state of expectant excitement.

It had been arranged that the Commissioner, accompanied by the Commandant and a staff officer should meet the Rajah at a spot about one hundred yards from the gate. Punctually to the hour the little party, dressed in white, passed out, being saluted by the armed guards stationed at the ramparts overlooking the meeting place. As they emerged, the Rajah, who had already arrived escorted by a squadron of his cavalry, detaching himself from his entourage, advanced alone to the meeting.

A handsome, well set up turbaned figure, standing some six feet, he moved with just that touch of arrogance which most oriental rulers can assume when the situation justifies it. He became the cynosure of many pairs of field glasses, his slightest gestures being scrutinised by the spectators.

The usual courtesies having being interchanged, the Rajah explained his mission, which, as promulgated afterwards, was as follows :

He, a loyal vassal of His Majesty, fully aware of the discomforts which the garrison were compelled to endure, offered the women and children safe conduct to, and protection at, his hill station about thirty miles distant ; the men his protection in the discarded barracks of Nadirpur, on condition that he was permitted to occupy the Fort until such time as law and order throughout the country was re-established.

To this the Commissioner had replied that as the Fort contained considerable quantities of arms, ammunition, stores, and treasures, which could not be removed nor conveniently destroyed, he must decline to consider His Highness's thoughtful offer. He hoped, however, that the Rajah would not only permit, but endeavour to persuade the inhabitants to send supplies of fresh meat, vegetables and dairy produce to the garrison ; concluding with the assurance that His Majesty's Government would be sure, in due course, to reward such obviously valuable services.

The Rajah then pointed out that as he was well outside the confines of his own dominions he was not in a position to comply with this request ; moreover he had his own troops to provision by forced requisition, which naturally caused him to be looked upon as an enemy of a more undesirable character than the British.

Although there was a strong temptation to exchange the unpleasant conditions of the Fort for the salubrious breezes of the hills, especially as regards the women and children, everyone felt that the Commissioner had acted wisely. The ghastly tragedy of Elphinstone at Cabul and the still worse one at Cawnpore in 1857 were sufficiently vivid reminders against placing any reliance on the word or undertakings of an oriental ruler.

It was obvious that apart from any sinister motives, the Rajah wished to enhance his prestige

by being able to occupy the Fort, whilst the fact that it contained valuable munitions of war was probably a further incentive. His refusal to assist in procuring supplies was significant, but there was no immediate anxiety beyond the increase in sickness to justify an acceptance of the offer. The Rajah remained in the vicinity of Nadirpur : he made no further proposals, and the incident having provided the garrison with a fresh topic of conversation for a few days, was soon forgotten.

The beleaguerment dragged on. Another aeroplane appeared, and this time successfully dropped its mail. No change in the situation so far as Nadirpur was concerned could be expected, but elsewhere matters were improving and it was hoped that communication would be restored before the rainy season set in.

Bobby had got to crutches and the hospital concerts, but it was evident that the wound had seriously undermined his health : he was a mere shadow of his former self, and at times suffered acute pain. He and Mary saw a great deal of one another, and between them an intimacy sprang up which was rapidly losing the platonic character which had marked the early days of their acquaintance-ship.

Towards the middle of June, those peculiar atmospheric conditions which in the tropics foretell some violent disturbance, became noticeable. The heat was stifling, the very air seemed impregnated with some asphyxiating property. About noon on the third day of torture several persons stated that they heard distant thunder, but the dull red haze which hung like a pall over the surrounding country showed no signs of being dispersed as is usually the case if a storm is brewing.

The majority of the garrison were indulging in the midday siesta so necessary to all who dwell in the plains of India during the hot weather, when sud-

denly they were startled by an ominous rumble accompanied by a trembling of the buildings ; almost simultaneously the sounding of the alarm summoned the fighting personnel to their stations. A few minutes' respite followed, then came a shock of greater intensity causing the weaker buildings to show signs of collapse.

Everyone who could do so, rushed from their houses into the open. A third shock of greater violence brought down masses of masonry and tilted the wireless masts to dangerous angles. For a moment it seemed as if the entire fort would be demolished by the cataclysm. Then the tremors ceased as suddenly as they had commenced.

Mary was preparing to leave her ward in order to join her mother for the midday rest when the first shock made itself felt. The rest of the staff, with the exception of two on duty, had already left. She realised at once that it must be an earthquake and that a serious catastrophe might be imminent. She felt uncertain what to do—there were a great number of women and children in the ward, some of them too ill to move. She was consulting with the nurse on duty when the second shock occurred. That decided her, so ordering all who could move to get outside as quickly as possible to seek shelter in the open, clear of the walls, she endeavoured to protect those unable to move by piling on them mattresses and pillows of the vacated beds. Fortunately the building was strongly built with thick buttressed walls not easily shaken down.

The third shock brought down quantities of plaster and débris of every description but the main walls and roof held together.

Suddenly Mary recollected that Bobby was without his crutches—they were undergoing alterations. She hastened along the passage leading down to his room to find the door closed, nor could it be opened. Having hammered on it she was greatly relieved to

hear a cheery voice saying, "Come in, if you can, but mind the rocks!"

"But I can't open the door, Bobby," she cried, dropping the surname. "How are you?"

"Under the bed, right as rain, but nearly smothered in plaster and dust."

"I think you ought to get outside, Bobby, before another shock comes."

"Well, if the door's jammed I can't, so that's that; anyhow, since the old place has survived the last rattle I daresay it will another, and probably I am safer here than lurching about rocking passages. What about yourself? I suggest you skip it."

"Well, I am doing no good here," replied Mary dejectedly, "so I'll return to my ward: *au revoir* until we can release you."

"Bye bye," shouted Bobby. "Take care of yourself"; then to himself, "I'd marry her if I wasn't a pauper."

Mary hastened back to the ward and found considerable panic prevailing, but as no further shocks occurred, she went outside to see what was happening.

The actual damage to the buildings was not so great as she had expected, although immediately around her the ground was littered with masonry and tiles. There were several large gaps in the parapet surrounding the ramparts and one of the wireless masts had toppled over. In the central square she could see the troops drawn up. The Commandant was evidently calling over a roll of names. Suddenly, she espied Mrs. Redmond apparelled in a kimono, busily trying to calm several excited children.

"Is it over, do you think, Mrs. Redmond?" inquired Mary.

"Sure, who can tell? I was wondering how many had survived the killing."

"A good many," observed Mary, smiling, "you can see how few of the main buildings have fallen : I know no one in my ward was seriously injured—only a few bruises from falling plaster and stuff."

Just then the parade broke up into various squads, which moved to their respective stations.

"I am going back now, Mrs. Redmond, to get my patients into their cots and to tidy up ; there does not seem to be anything else I can do for the moment."

This having been accomplished, Mary went out to see her mother. She found her lying on her bed none the worse for the experience but very distressed at the fan being out of action.

"Is that all, Mother ? I was afraid you might have been injured by bits of the roof falling on you or something. What a horrible experience ! I hope we won't have any further shocks ; very little more will bring down everything."

"I have felt it in my bones that something dreadful was going to happen," wailed Mrs. Chapman ; "what shall we all do if the electricity has failed ?"

"I suppose, to use your favourite expression, we shall have to lump it, Mother, but if that is all the damage done, we are lucky."

"Yes, yes, I am sure there has been a dreadful catastrophe. This room shook so badly I thought we were about to be engulfed in some horrible fissure."

Further lamentations on the part of Mrs. Chapman were cut short by the entry of the quite unperturbed Yussaf with a circular from the Commissioner saying he wished to meet the members of the Mess at 5 p.m.

Mary, having read it out, initialed the paper and handed it back.

"You must represent me, Mary, I feel too exhausted to attend."

"Very well, Mother ; I now intend to lie down as I am very tired."

CHAPTER V

THE EVACUATION

At the appointed hour Mr. Day entered the Mess. His face wore a grave expression.

"I have called you together," he said, "in order to let you know that we are faced with a very serious situation. Fortunately there has been no loss of life, and only very few casualties: the material damage done to the walls and main buildings of the Fort is insignificant. The electric power is out of action as many of the wires have been broken, but this can be rectified in time. The wireless plant is injured beyond repair; that is also hardly a matter of great concern, is it, Mrs. Redmond?" he remarked with a wan smile, "we really are wireless! But I now have to inform you of a disaster which probably none of you have even thought of—the two wells which supply the Fort are empty. It is evident that the earthquake has altered the water level. Fortunately the iron storage tanks are intact, and we have, with great care, enough water to last us forty-eight to sixty hours.

In all likelihood the wells round about us are affected in a similar way, but even if they are not empty, the output from them would be of questionable purity. We can no longer stay here. I have therefore sent to the Rajah of Mundapur, informing him that owing to serious damage by the earthquake I am prepared to reconsider his proposals. I do not know what his attitude will be, but in view of the recent good news, he may wish to establish himself in favour with the Government by rendering us assistance. I am now awaiting his

reply, but in the meantime I considered it would be as well to apprise you all of the situation ; it is not exactly desperate, but most disquieting ; even if the Rajah extends to us his hospitality, very grave problems await us. That is all for the present, but I want you to be ready to leave in twenty-four hours. Only the barest necessities can be moved."

The meeting broke up. Very little was said, everyone being overwhelmed by the sudden and quite unexpected calamity.

Mary decided to say nothing to her mother until something more definite transpired. In repeating what had occurred at the meeting she therefore described it as a lot of rigmarole about the damage and the steps to be taken to rectify it.

Late the same evening the Rajah arrived in person. He was admitted to the Fort, the Commissioner and Commandant deeming it advisable that he should see with his own eyes how little real damage had been done—the wireless masts had been set perpendicular and the wires attached. He was conducted to the Commissioner's quarters where Mr. Day, after inquiring how he and his troops had fared, proceeded to discuss the terms of an evacuation rendered expedient by the destruction of the electric plant—a calamity which at this season meant great hardships for the women and children.

"That is easily settled, Sahib," interrupted the Rajah : "I will arrange it all : they shall go to my hill station at Sukanundi where they will enjoy every comfort in the big guest house I have built there. The soldiers can go back to their barracks here."

"I thank your Highness very much for your generous offer, but there are one or two conditions which I must insist on," answered the Commissioner. "Everyone at present in the Fort must proceed to Sukanundi together with such baggage and treasure as may appear to me necessary : as to the stores,

bank securities, etc., I will leave them in your charge, knowing that your Highness will take every care of them."

"What you propose, Sahib, is unacceptable to me : there is no accommodation at Sukanundi for the soldiers, nor indeed for the civilian men who are here. I can only offer you sanctuary for the women and children : the remainder must stay here—in the Fort, if you like."

Mr. Day, being faced with a decidedly awkward dilemma, wanted time to think. He was hesitating on the nature of his reply when an orderly was announced, who handed the Commandant a telegram, saying, "A message from Army Headquarters."

The Commandant having opened the telegram, handed it to the Commissioner, who very deliberately began to feel for his glasses ; having cleaned and adjusted them in a leisurely manner he took up the form, and glanced at it.

"I see it is in cypher, Major Gresson," he said. Then turning to the Rajah, he added, "I must ask you to excuse me for a few moments. I have received a communication from my Government, and of course, in these troublesome times it is in secret writing and requires to be translated : My Staff will look after you during the short time I am absent." Rising, he withdrew, accompanied by the Commandant.

"A most opportune intervention, Gresson. Allow me to congratulate you on the *ruse* ; but we must be quick. Have you any suggestions?" demanded the Commissioner.

"I have," replied Major Gresson. "Tell the Rajah that we have had a reply to our message reporting the disastrous earthquake, and that the Government have suggested us applying to our Ally the Rajah who is known to be near at hand. Add that if His Highness cannot see his way to accept

our terms, we must inform our Government accordingly."

"I will try it," observed the Commissioner; "let us write out an imaginary message, which I will read to him."

This having been done, both returned to the Rajah, to whom the Commissioner read the message, the latter handing it to him to peruse if he liked, saying, "You see, your Highness, I have already anticipated the action suggested by my Government. I have stated our terms, and it remains for you to accept them, thus proving your allegiance to us. If you feel you cannot agree to them, I must report to my superiors, who will, no doubt, interpret your action as scarcely that to be expected from an Ally."

The Rajah looked perturbed. This was not what he wanted at all, but it was evident that the Sahib Log were still in communication with their Government. If that was the case there was no knowing what they might do. It was his turn to play for time.

"Very well, Sahib, I will give you my reply to-morrow by noon."

"I am afraid that will not do, your Highness. I must report at once, as if your Highness cannot accede to my conditions it will be necessary to summon aid from the air by our flying machines. I wish if possible to march out to-morrow evening. I can let you know the number of carts you must impress for our transport."

The Rajah rapidly reviewed the situation. Perhaps it would be for the best if he let the whole lot go to Sukanundi, thus getting them out of the way. He would take possession of the Fort. If hereafter things went as he hoped they might, he would have established himself at an important place, and could deal with the garrison at his leisure by cutting off their supplies. If, on the other hand, matters went favourably for the British, he would acquire consid-

erable favour for his action, thus probably increase his territory—there were several areas he coveted.

“ I will accept your conditions, Sahib,” he said at last, “ and will make all arrangements for your march to-morrow evening on the first stage. Will you let me know your requirements in vehicles. I will begin collecting them now. A squadron of my Cavalry will escort you to Sukanundi to which place I will despatch a courier to-night in order to prepare for your arrival.”

“ I thank your Highness for your generous aid. I will advise my Government at once that you are placing your hill station at our disposal.”

The Rajah withdrew, Mr. Day accompanying him to the gates.

“ Well, that’s settled, Gresson. Thank heavens, he did not inquire about the water ; but will he keep his word ? ”

“ I think so. He does not quite know his mind, but wishes to keep on the right side of the fence for the present. This, coupled with his cupidity and desire to enhance his importance in and around Nadirpur will help us for the present. The future is in the hands of the gods.”

“ It will be a great rush getting off,” commented the Commissioner, “ but I thought it wise to pin him down to to-morrow evening : something may go wrong which will compel us to postpone our departure, and in view of our scanty water supply, it is better to get away as soon as possible.”

“ We can hold out for about one hundred hours, Mr. Day, but as you say, it is better to move out to-morrow evening if we can ; anyhow everyone must be ready to do so.”

“ I fear the women, children and inmates of the hospitals will have a bad three days of it, Gresson, but by moving at night and choosing a shady spot for our halts things won’t be too bad : we can do the journey in three marches, the last one will be com-

paratively cool. You will, of course, issue your orders at once : I will make a suitable announcement at dinner."

" I'd rather march by daylight, Mr. Day ; it is so much easier to ensure protection."

" Impossible," retorted the Commissioner. " We would lose too many by exposure to the sun ; besides we shall be packing all to-night. To adopt your suggestion would mean postponing the march for twelve hours ; we must certainly move by night."

" There are three or four motor cars : we might send the worst hospital cases straight through to Sukanundi together with a responsible officer who could help the Durbar authorities in making arrangements. There would be a certain amount of risk but less danger than esposing the invalids to a three days' crawl in this weather."

" Quite a good idea, Gresson. You had better consult the doctors, however, and if they agree, I will sound the Rajah about it to-morrow."

As Mrs. Chapman had not attended dinner, it became necessary for Mary to inform her concerning the move.

" I told you some dreadful calamity would befall us," moaned her mother, when she heard what had happened. " I shall never survive a march at this season, and for all we can tell we may be butchered in cold blood on the way."

" That's better than a lingering death from thirst or pestilence, Mother, and if we survive we shall anyhow have a cool climate."

" If we ever reach it alive," insisted Mrs. Chapman.

" I think you had better try to sleep off some of your pessimism, Mother, whilst I do the packing up."

It was well into the early hours when Mary lay down to snatch some sleep, or rather rest, as the loss of the fan precluded slumber. With Yussaf and a

smoky hurricane lantern she had arranged exactly what was to be taken and what was to be left.

As predicted by Mr. Day, the greater part of the garrison were up all night making preparations for their flight. Many matters required attention, and the loss of the electric light greatly retarded the work ; indeed had it not been for a brilliant moon very little would have been accomplished. But favoured thus by Providence the preparations were well advanced at breakfast hour, when, by general consent rather than by order, everyone took a well-earned respite.

The Rajah had certainly kept his word. From 8 a.m. onwards strings of carts and tongas had begun to assemble outside the Fort, but whether this was a result of *force majeure* or of the temptation accorded by the prospect of adequate remuneration—singularly wanting since the commencement of the Hartal—it was hard to say, but judging by the almost boisterous good spirits of the owners they evidently relished the prospect of again entering the service of the Sahib Log.

In spite of the fierce heat—the thermometer was registering 115 in the shade—work was resumed about noon. With the exception of those too ill to assist, everyone joined in a united effort to ensure a punctual start : an effort of such intensity as to dispel any pessimism or regard for the heat.

The loading of the baggage, treasure, and ammunition was attended by a chaos which seemed to preclude any possibility of ordered finality, yet it was accomplished in an incredibly short time, the vehicles, mainly bullock carts, being parked ready to move well in advance of time.

After a hurried tea the task of removing the sick, the women and children to their vehicles, commenced; in which Mrs. Redmond and Mrs. Roberts played the prominent part of general conciliators. This occupied a considerable time, necessitating

many adjustments, but at last all was as ready as the hurried preparations permitted, and the Column fully assembled outside the Fort, prepared to start.

The Union Jack had been lowered at retreat by which hour the custody of the Fort was made over to the Indian Commandant of one of the Rajah's Infantry regiments, who had arrived with his disorderly-looking troops.

It had been decided that a few of the worst cases should be sent ahead in motors with a representative of the Rajah together with an officer, and two non-commissioned officers, Bobby being amongst those included.

It was well after sunset before the order of move was given. The moon was just rising as the head of the convoy started to wend its laborious way through the deserted Cantonments, where the charred skeletons of the burnt bungalows stood out stark and gaunt in the pale light.

Except for the rumbling of the carts or the occasional shout of a driver, the caravan of human freight drifted along silently—everyone was too tired and exhausted to indulge in conversation.

Out in the open country the air became perceptibly cooler.

On,—on,—through the seemingly interminable hours crept the column of fugitives. A short halt was made about midnight to rest the escort and animals ; then onwards, onwards !

At dawn they halted in the vicinity of a cluster of mango trees where it was decided to stop during the day. Those who could quit their vehicles did so at once, and in spite of their great fatigue set to work to organise the bivouac, but the sun was well up in the heavens before a meal could be prepared or the much needed rest enjoyed.

The heat was much less oppressive here than in the Fort, and a strong breeze blowing from the hills a few miles ahead carried a cool current of air through

the camp which dissipated that stuffiness so noticeable when in the vicinity of heavy foliated tropical trees. By noon except for a few unfortunate sentries the entire garrison was wrapped in slumber. At 4 p.m. a bugle call roused the camp, when a substantial tea having been prepared and taken, preparations were made for continuing the journey.

The great heat of the day was waning when the column resumed its march. The road which was good fortunately soon entered the foothills, and by night a cool breeze indicated to all that a considerable altitude had been reached. Another nocturnal halt, then onwards, but upwards. The rate of progress became slower as the tired out animals and escort breasted the steep ascent. An occasional breakdown added to the delays, dawn breaking before the column had reached the top of the winding ghaut.

Mary, aroused from intermittent drowsiness by the morning air, could discern the more prominent features of the landscape. Behind and below them spread the vast panorama of a haze-enveloped plain; to the right and left the rugged scrub covered spurs and precipitous valleys of the hills, whilst, above, towered a few crag-like peaks.

Mary's mother, propped around with cushions, continued to dose. It seemed incredible that anyone could obtain repose in these jolting rickety conveyances, yet glancing at the vehicles nearest to her, Mary could see that the occupants were wrapped in a torpor-like slumber which only intense fatigue could have induced.

She decided to get out in order to stretch her aching limbs by walking. It was obvious that the summit of the hill was close at hand; the gradient was becoming less severe, whilst here and there on either hand were level spaces.

She had hardly proceeded a quarter of a mile when she noticed one of those cautionary signs erect-

ed by some benevolent Automobile Association to warn drivers that a steep descent was close at hand, so she concluded that the longed-for halt was not far distant. Even the draught animals seemed to share her conjecture, perceptibly quickening their pace. Rounding a sharp bend in the road she could see the leading animals turning off along a track.

The sudden spurt had thoroughly aroused everyone, whilst the agreeable coolness dispelled, to some extent, the gruelling effects of the previous twenty-four hours' torture. A messenger from the Rajah awaited the Commissioner with information that the cars carrying the sick had arrived, and that the preparations at Sukanundi, some ten miles further on, were complete—a piece of news which acted as a further dispellant of pessimism. The prospect of comfortable beds with other amenities amidst cool surroundings induced a demand of an early resumption of their march, a demand which the Commandant eagerly seized upon, notwithstanding the evident exhaustion of the animals.

“We'll make a four hour halt of it,” he remarked to the Commissioner, “then push on to Sukanundi or drop in our tracks.”

The Rajah had thoughtfully arranged for a plentiful supply of milk which was not only much needed by the invalids and children, but betokened his good will—or as Mr. Day remarked, further good news from the disturbed areas.

The march was resumed with an alacrity which astonished everyone—such was the inspiring effect of the near approach of sheets, blankets, and even eiderdowns. The ten intervening miles rolled by as if by magic, and the convoy seemed hardly to have started, before its head sighted the white domes and minarets of the Rajah's palace.

Several deputies of the Durbar met the Commissioner on the outskirts of Sukanundi to act as guide. One of the hotels had been allotted to the women

and children, the other as a hospital, the men being accommodated in various houses and huts according to their rank and station.

The convoy as it dispersed to its quarters offered a striking contrast to the spick and span settlement at Sukanundi ; travel-stained, bedraggled, the men displaying three days' growth of bristle, its personnel could hardly have been mistaken for anything else but fugitives.

Mary had to assist her mother to the room provided for them. The last few days had so exhausted Mrs. Chapman's slender reserve of stamina that she was bordering on a state of delirium.

Mary, having put her to bed, left Yussaf to arrange their few belongings, and then went over to the hospital to assist.

Contrary to the doleful prophesies there were very few additional cases. The sudden release from the oppressive heat of the Fort at Nadirpur had had a beneficial effect on all in spite of three days' exposure and fatigue.

With marvellous smoothness all settled into their new surroundings. The delightful sensation of sheets that felt cool and hot baths which might have been warmer acted as a powerful sleeping draught. The fugitives—men, women and children—slept as they had slept at no time during the previous two months.

CHAPTER VI

A RAJAH'S RECEPTION AND AN INVITATION

So busy was everyone tidying themselves up, that the next two days seemed to flash by in no time. Wardrobes were scanty, and consequently the process of getting their attire laundried became a serious problem. Some stayed in bed ; others, commencing above the waist, were restricted to their nether garments, or *vice versa*.

The Rajah, after an interview with Mr. Day, arranged an afternoon reception at his palace for all those enjoying the designation ' Sahib Log.'

At first Mrs. Chapman refused to go, but Mary prevailed on her to change her mind.

" It will do you good, Mother," she said. " I intend going anyhow, if only to make the acquaintance of our host and to compare our extemporised party frocks."

The summer residence of the ruler of Mundesur was a modern palatial pile situated on the outskirts of Sukanundi, overlooking a picturesque ornamental lake made by damming up one of the numerous valleys. The building itself was of a florid type surmounted by embellishments in doubtful taste not uncommonly associated with orientals obsessed by a craving for bricks and mortar.

The grounds, intended to be an additional attraction, were a hideous mixture of the ill-kempt and ill-assorted beds and borders so beloved of Indian Malis : the lawns were untidy, being furrowed all over with marks of a disordered mower.

His Highness received the guests in a large pillared hall garishly decorated, from the ceilings of

which were suspended many glass chandeliers generously coated with dust.

The Commissioner introduced each guest to him, and after shaking hands with him, passed on to mingle with the remainder of the company either in the hall or outside.

Mary, as she shook hands, thought that his handsome features and apparent affability were marred by a sinister expression. He seemed to scrutinise her closely.

She and her mother repaired to the terrace outside, and there they encountered Bobby Ritchie looking a changed person. He had discarded his crutches for a single stout stick and although still lame, managed to get about.

"You look uncommonly well, Bobby," remarked Mary. "Sukanundi appears to agree with you."

"Do I, Miss Chapman?" he replied. "So do you in that frock. I believe I saw it being made at Mahdeos. A wonderful place India! Here we are—fugitives from a rebellion—living in comparative luxury—receptions, Paris frocks, and Saville Row tailoring"—glancing at his obviously new shorts.

"Woolworth's," interjected Mary laughing.

"Have you any news, Mr. Ritchie?" interrupted Mrs. Chapman; "now that we are separated I never hear any."

"Nor anybody else," replied Bobby, "I daresay our dusky host knows a thing or two, but he doesn't part with the khubber, and here he comes to mingle with the general company, as the home paper says."

Mary, looking round, noticed that the Rajah was emerging from the portico of the house. As he made his way across the lawn accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Day, he stopped to say a few words to one or two of his guests. He seemed to be scanning the remainder as if searching for some particular individual. Then suddenly he moved in the direction of the Chapmans and Bobby, stopped once or twice

to acknowledge an introduction by the Commissioner, then came to where Mary and her mother was standing.

"I think we had the pleasure of an introduction a few minutes ago," he remarked to Mrs. Chapman, then turning towards Mr. Day added, "that is so, Sahib, is it not?"

"Yes, Rajah Sahib, I introduced you to both ladies."

"I think," resumed the Rajah, turning towards Mary, "I remember seeing you at Canauj: you honoured a distant kinsman of mine, Pertab Singh, by dancing with him after the explosion of the bomb."

"Quite right, Rajah Sahib," replied Mary, "you have a good memory."

"Not at all, Miss Chapman: the incident was, to say the least of it, unusual, and the circumstances still more so; it is easy to remember things like that."

"Have you any news of Thakur Pertab Singh?" inquired Mary.

"Alas, none for weeks now, Miss Chapman. Since all this trouble has fallen on the country, there is no news; only rumours and still more rumours."

"Well, haven't you even a rumour about him?" laughingly demanded Mary.

"Only that he was serving the Government in some capacity or other. You and your mother, and perhaps your young friend here," indicating Bobby, "must one day pay me a visit at my castle by a great lake situated some forty miles away."

"I shall be delighted to do so, Rajah Sahib, and I am sure my friend Mr. Ritchie would enjoy it. Is there any fishing? He is a keen fisherman."

"Yes, Miss Chapman, there are many large fish, so perhaps the sahib will pay me the honour of catching some."

"Thank you very much," put in Bobby. "If you

can lend me some tackle and take me there—I can't walk much yet—I'll pay you the honour of catching the fish."

"Very well, it shall be arranged some day after we get our first fall of rain. I hope you are quite comfortable in our Guest House, Mrs. Chapman."

"Luxuriously so, Rajah Sahib, it is very good of you to have taken so much trouble on our behalf. I am sure all of us are most grateful to you."

"I must come and see how things are—just an informal inspection, as you would say," replied the Rajah.

"Oh, please don't trouble on our account," interjected Mary; "we have everything we could possibly want."

"It is no trouble but a pleasure, Miss Chapman. I have told the Commissioner Sahib that I would look round all the buildings; so, of course, I can't miss out yours."

At this juncture Mrs. Redmond came up. She had missed the formal reception, but seeing the Rajah talking to the Chapmans had asked Mr. Day to introduce her.

"Of course, Mrs. Redmond. His Highness would feel that the function had been incomplete without making your acquaintance," replied the Commissioner quizzically.

"Sure, I'll complete it all right. I want to borrow that hall of his for entertainments."

The Rajah had hardly shaken hands, when Mrs. Redmond broached the subject.

"What hall do you mean?" inquired the Rajah, "surely not my hall of Audience."

"What else would a Hall of Audience be for, your Highness?" I'll find the audience."

The Rajah, somewhat taken aback and confused by the voluble Irishwoman, replied rather coldly:

"I must consider the matter after consulting with the Commissioner."

"Sure, Mr. Day will agree to anything Molly Redmond suggests your Highness—just ask him."

The Rajah deftly disengaged himself from the group and passed on.

As soon as he was out of earshot, Mrs. Redmond laughingly remarked: "I believe I rattled that black humbug, but he'll give me his—what did he call it—Audience Hall. I don't know what it is, but I want that gaudy room with its thousand electric lights for a grand revivalist tamasha."

"I thought that organising entertainments was *my* show, Mrs. Redmond. I am the manager, you are only one of the stars," demurred Mary.

"If that's the case, me girl, then you'll have to tow the line like any other theatrical manager who gets bullied by his leading lady."

"If you really want to appear in the hall of a thousand lights, you'd better leave the matter in my hands," retorted Mary. "I think I can persuade our host to lend it, if anyone can."

"Can you now, Mary: do you think that old trimmer takes an interest in you?"

"Perhaps," answered Mary enigmatically.

"Well, get it."

"I am sure the Rajah takes no special interest in Mary, Mrs. Redmond, at least I hope not," interposed Mrs. Chapman.

"If Mary thinks he does, he does," declared Mrs. Redmond, "and if his interest can be utilised to get the hall, then make use of it, say I."

Two days later the arrival of the long expected monsoon was heralded by a heavy downpour of rain—a regular tropical cascade accompanied by dark leaden-coloured banks of clouds sweeping up from the South-West. Neither mackintoshes nor brollies being available, one had to stay in or go out and get soaked. Scanty wardrobes compelled the majority to stay in.

Bobby's quarters being nearly a mile from Mary's,

they did not see much of each other. Everybody became very bored.

The Rajah, true to his word, visited the Chapman's place of residence, not once, but on three occasions. The first time, ostensibly to inquire if the roof leaked. The edifice being of Indian construction, the percolation of moisture was profuse, a circumstance that necessitated a further visit in order to ascertain if his orders had been carried out. As they had been shamefully evaded, the august presence deemed it incumbent upon him to repair once again to the scene of his endeavours in order to impose such penalties as appeared expedient, or, contrive further excuse for yet another inspection.

Every time he came, he found some pretext for seeing the Chapmans. Mary was honestly amused and interested by these visits—they helped to leaven the tedium of confinement to the house. She had accepted his first appearance as a self-imposed act of conventional courtesy, but the second and third seemed so unnecessary that she came to the conclusion there must be some motive behind them. Feminine-like her curiosity was aroused.

During their second meeting she broached the subject of the loan of the hall for an entertainment to the soldiers and their womenfolk.

"That talking woman I met at my reception has persuaded you to demand this of me," replied the Rajah with some acerbity.

"Not at all," demurred Mary. "Whilst at Nadirpur I was a member of a committee which organised amusements; and therefore it is my place to ask, not Mrs. Redmond's."

The Rajah thought a moment before replying.

"I cannot lend my Hall of Audience for your Tommies, as you call them, to smoke and spit in."

Mary laughed.

"They have no tobacco, Rajah Sahib, and they certainly won't spit."

" Perhaps, but all the same I cannot permit them to have it. To please you, however, I will do this for them. There will be arranged an entertainment of juggling, acrobatics, and some nautches in a great tent which I will have put up for the purpose near their quarters. What do you say to that, Miss Chapman ? "

" I think it is a splendid idea, Rajah Sahib. When do you propose to have it ? "

" I must consult with my controller who arranges such matters. There will be a break in the rains soon, and that ought to afford a good opportunity. I shall be coming here again, and then we can discuss it as well as the visit to the great lake which I spoke of before."

At the third visit of the Rajah Mary kept him waiting half an hour. " Tell him I am engaged and offer him some refreshment," she remarked to Yussaf. When she appeared she apologised for the delay.

" I do not mind, Miss Chapman : I would willingly wait a long time if by so doing I could have the honour of your company for a few minutes' conversation. I want to speak to you about the visit to the great lake."

" And the entertainment, Rajah Sahib," put in Mary.

" Yes, about that too."

" You said," Mary reminded him, " that you would arrange for Mr. Ritchie and myself to go—he was to have some fishing."

The Rajah deliberated before he replied.

" It is a long journey, Miss Chapman, and unless you are prepared to spend at least one night at my old Fort you may find the journey there and back in the day fatiguing ; moreover, if you try to do it in one day, as soon as you arrive you will have to return without seeing anything. That would be absurd, would it not ? I know something of your

English customs, and should you decide to prolong your stay, it would be considered indiscreet—that is the word, I think—for Mr. Ritchie to accompany you, even if I join you, which I propose to do. Could you not select as a companion one of your own sex : I would suggest your mother, but that she could not support the journey and that on arrival we would have to leave her at my Fort by herself as the sight-seeing would be too tiring for her. Later on, I will, perhaps, arrange for Mr. Ritchie with some of his friends to go.”

“ I will think it over, Rajah Sahib.”

After he had gone Mary thought it over very carefully. To make a long and tedious motor drive merely to view, for a few minutes, some crumbling old Fort on the shores of a considerable expanse of water did not appeal to her. On the other hand, should she decide to make it a two or three day excursion then the Rajah was right when he said that Bobby Ritchie's company would be an indiscretion. Secrecy was out of the question except perhaps the day and hour of starting. In any case her mother would oppose the projected trip but her opposition might be minimised if a suitable chaperon could be procured ; but who ? Mrs. Redmond at once came to mind, but it was quite evident that her presence would be distasteful to her host. She could think of no one else for the moment so decided to sleep on the problem.

She awoke with that feeling of insecurity engendered by intense darkness. Alert to every sound as one generally is on these occasions, Mary wondered what had disturbed her. She could only hear the steady drumming of the tropical rain on the verandah outside. To clarify her mind and to regain that composure necessary if slumber was to be renewed, she switched on the bedside light. There was nothing to be seen ; even the ubiquitous mosquito seemed absent. She extinguished the light,

hoping to resume her sleep, but without success—her brain had acquired a restiveness that could not be subdued. She tried counting and every other artifice known to those who suffer from insomnia.

At last she gave it up, and turned her thoughts to the Rajah's invitation. She really *did* wish to see this wonderful artificial lake concerning which she had heard strange and sinister rumours of boiling cauldrons, whirlpools, and mysterious Islands inhabited by a bigoted Brahmanacal Priesthood. What a nuisance these conventions were : with Bobby as a companion the trip would have been more than enjoyable even if the Rajah had imposed his presence on them. Suddenly an idea struck her. Mrs. Roberts ! The very person. She would see if it could be arranged.

Sleep instantly resumed its sway.

Three days later at an hour when the increasing daylight makes it incumbent on all self-respecting Chowkidars to advertise their alertness by dissembling wakefulness, a well-appointed limousine whose panels bore a florid heraldic device might have been seen stealing its way through Sukanundi. Its blinds were drawn. It stopped at the Rajah's palace where it was joined by another saloon car of more sumptuous proportions. Then both cars sped away into the country.

CHAPTER VII

IN QUEST OF A HEALER

Since the arrival of the rains, Bobby had seen very little of Mary. Indeed, he had come to the conclusion that she was deliberately avoiding him : being a healthy young Englishman he attributed this to feminine caprice. He had heard no more about the projected fishing trip, consequently had numbered it amongst those many unattainable desires which momentarily agitate one's existence.

It happened that his bearer, Mehban, was related to Yussaf by one of those inscrutable, other side of the blanket, circumstances, by no means uncommon in the East. The two men frequently foregathered for an evening chat, rain or no rain. Thus it came about that the evening before Mary's departure, Yussaf had confided to Mehban the information that the Sahiba, accompanied by a Sergeant's wife, was going for a long drive the next day in one of the Rajah's cars.

As Bobby was dressing after his evening tub, Mehban imparted the news to his master who received it with a significant whistle.

"So that's it!" he reflected. "I am to be shelved."

"How long will the Sahiba be away, Mehban," he inquired.

"God knows, but Yussaf mentioned one day."

"Is she taking any luggage?"

"I will inquire, Sahib; she leaves early to-morrow morning."

"Very good, Mehban, you must be there to see."

"Your honour's order will be obeyed."

After dinner Bobby sounded his Commanding Officer on the subject of obtaining two or three days' leave to avail himself of the Rajah's offer to let him fish one of his lakes.

"I think that will be all right, Ritchie," replied Major Gresson; "you are a lucky dog to get the offer, and might throw out a hint that there are others who'd appreciate a similar privilege."

Bobby, thinking it well to oil the wheels, hinted that if all went well with his expedition, the Rajah might become more expansive.

"You see, Major, it was just a bit of luck," he said. "The Rajah was talking about his lake to Miss Chapman and myself when I butted in and asked if there was any fishing and the bloke said at once that there was, also that he would lend me tackle. I forgot all about it till to-day when one of the Rajah's chuprassis blew in asking me when it would be convenient for me to avail myself of the offer; as His Highness had issued the necessary orders. I have got to find my own way to the place, so must make a few arrangements, but would like to be free to set out as soon as ever I have fixed things up."

"It sounds all right, Ritchie, and when you have become acquainted with the local conditions we'll see if we can't squeeze a few more rods out of the fellow: if we can't do anything else, we may as well fish."

Mehban faithfully reported Mary's departure with Mrs. Roberts in the Rajah's car. Each had taken a suit-case: they were expected back the following afternoon.

Bobby decided to await events, but closely questioned his servant concerning the surrounding country and its people. He carefully scrutinised a map, even dipping into that super-Baedeker, the Indian Gazatteer, which he had discovered in one of the hotels. He noticed that there were within fifty

miles radius of Sukanundi several sheets of water of considerable extent, but to which one Mary had gone he could not determine.

With Bobby's afternoon tea the next day, Mehban reported that the sahibas had not returned ; a further inquiry at dinner time elicited the news that not only were they still absent but that Mrs. Chapman was seriously perturbed.

Bobby having figured matters out decided to waste no more time. His application for leave had presumably been sanctioned—a matter he could clear up at dinner when he saw the Commandant.

"Quite all right, Ritchie, but for heaven's sake be discreet," cautioned Major Gresson ; "you must remember that although this part of the country is apparently quiet, I might almost say, unaffected by the disturbances prevailing elsewhere, one can never tell what may happen. Anyhow," he added with a laugh, "in the interests of the gentle art, you can go, but we don't want to launch an expedition in order to extricate you. By the way, where are you going ?"

Bobby, pulling out a map, indicated a lake about twenty-five miles distant from Sukanundi : "I believe that's the place where I am to meet His Highness's Director of Fisheries—just a good day's march."

As soon as dinner was finished Bobby returned to his hut and called his bearer.

"Look here, Mehban," he said, "if the sahibas are not back by to-morrow morning I intend to follow them. You will accompany me, and provide me with a suitable disguise—you come from this part of the country so ought to know the right thing."

"That is difficult, Sahib : you speak the language very badly, are very white, and have blue eyes."

"Never mind, Mehban : I will colour my skin, wear my glare goggles, keep my face nearly covered, and pretend I am a deaf, dumb, and nearly blind

relative of yours whom you are escorting to some recluse possessed of miraculous power of healing—you must think of one. Now be off and make all arrangements."

"Your Honour will have to do and remember too many things. Will you eat the food of the country?"

"Certainly, Mehban : tinned sausages or salmon, even if obtainable, would soon give the show away. I shall take my Mauser automatic pistol, with its shoulder piece, two hundred rupees in cash, my compass, small camp canteen, electric torch, field-glasses and washing things."

"Very good, Sahib, all will be arranged."

At dawn Bobby, disguised as a Mahomedan of humble circumstances, set out with Mehban, the latter, for their greater convenience, having secured a fast trotting bullock cart.

It was an easy matter picking up the car tracks, for although blurred, they were indelibly stamped on an indifferently metalled muddy road, which led through a hilly, densely wooded country, practically destitute of any habitations or traffic.

Now and again a halt was called, and Bobby would push his way into the forest, open his map, and check his position. Having covered about twenty miles, they stopped for the night by a small hamlet situated on the banks of a stream. Here, whilst Bobby made a final scrutiny of his map and the tracks of the car—out of sight of the bullock driver—Mehban interrogated the inhabitants.

As far as could be made out, the road was heading for one of the larger lakes some twenty or thirty miles further on. Mehban reported that the two cars had passed that way some sixty hours before, and that they had stopped for a few minutes in order to fill the radiators. An old grey bearded Bhil had inquired where the cars were proceeding, but had received no reply. He informed Mehban, however,

that the road led to a great lake on the banks of which the Rajah owned a castle called Hamirgarh.

At dawn the next morning Mehban roused Bobby in order to initiate him into the mysteries of Mahomedan prayer. The journey was then continued.

Towards evening the country became less wooded, and the few inhabitants encountered told Mehban that they were close to Hamirgarh. Bobby decided to halt. Two strangers appearing before the walls of the Fort in a trotting bullock cart might invite undesirable curiosity, and until he was certain of Mary's whereabouts he deemed it best to be neither seen nor heard. He therefore feigned an attack of fever, for it was his intention to send on Mehban the next morning on foot to spy out the land.

Mehban, as arranged, leaving his stricken relative in the care of the bullock driver, set out at sunrise. A three-mile walk brought him to Hamirgarh, a typical old-fashioned Indian stronghold, round the base of which clustered a few huts.

Some skilfully phrased inquiries elicited the information that three days ago two motor cars had passed into the Fort, but had not come out again. Mehban decided to go up to the entrance and, if possible, gain admission—he could pass himself off as an oriental mystic, soothsayer, and astrologer, who hoped the Rajah would permit him to cast a horoscope.

He found the gates wide open, and accosting a dilapidated sentry asked permission to enter. No objection being raised, he sauntered into the great courtyard where the first objects which met his sight were the two cars being washed down by half a dozen coolies under the supervision of one of the drivers. Mehban considered a moment whether there was any chance of the man recognising him, but came to the conclusion that the disguise he was wearing defied detection.

For a few minutes he watched the men at work, and then addressed the driver.

"Whose cars are these?" he questioned.

The man scrutinised him for a moment before replying.

"The Rajah Sahib's : who are you?"

"I am a wandering astrologer from Delhi who casts horoscopes," replied Mehban; "I seek an interview with the Rajah."

The driver looked at Mehban furtively, then grinned. "He is not here. He is entertaining two white women and yesterday took them away on the water, saying he would be absent some days; that in the meantime I was to have the cars cleaned."

"Where has the great one gone?" boldly demanded Mehban.

"Only those who went with him know."

"If that is the case I will go."

Mehban retraced his steps, and having passed through the gateway made his way to the edge of the lake—a vast expanse of water, surrounded, as far as he could see, by jungle covered hills. Seeing some men busy repairing nets he went over to them.

"How big is this lake?" he inquired.

They turned from their nets to look at him, then an old man spoke.

"You are certainly a stranger; why do you ask such a question?"

"I seek a place where dwells a holy man; I am told that his abode is the other side of the lake; I cannot see so far, hence my question."

"There are many sides to the lake," declared the old man, "but it is fifty kos round the edge of the water."

Mehban having expressed surprise, continued, "Are there many villages, or any forts besides this one?"

"Only a few huts of the fisher folk; there is a

fort, however, on an island, but I have never been to it," came the reply.

"Is the fort inhabited?" asked Mehban.

"There are a few retainers of the Rajah, also some priests in charge of shrines, but," added the speaker, "the waters of the lake are bewitched at certain seasons."

"The Rajah often goes on the lake?" suggested Mehban.

"Very rarely, but it so happens that he is there now, as we helped to get ready the boat which is driven by oil, also much food was taken."

"I suppose," observed Mehban, "that the Rajah has gone for shikar: these jungles must harbour game."

An enigmatical smile showed on the wrinkled features of the old fisherman, who hesitating for a moment, replied:—

"The Rajah had two white women with him."

Mehban decided he had heard enough, so continued to saunter aimlessly along the shore until out of sight, then he rapidly made his way back to Bobby, and having taken him aside, imparted the information he had gleaned.

"You have done well, Mehban. I must consider matters."

Bobby took out his map to examine it. There was nothing on it to indicate anything but endless forest surrounding the lake. Hamirgarh appeared as the terminating point of the road. No other roads or even tracks were marked.

There were two or three courses open. Return to Sukanundi. Wait for a few days where he was—in order to recover from his fever—in the hopes that the Rajah would return with Mary and Mrs. Roberts. Reconnoitre the shores of the lake by boat or on foot.

He was convinced that the Rajah had sinister designs against Mary, indeed had kidnapped her in the hopes of bending her to his passion. The very

thought of this made him shudder with apprehension. If his surmises were correct the presence on the lake of two suspicious strangers would soon reach the ears of the Rajah who would take immediate steps to checkmate them. On the other hand an exploration on foot, although tedious and slow, might escape notice. His leave was already up : he therefore determined to adopt the last project.

As soon as he was able to catch Mehban alone he unfolded his plans : namely to discharge the bullock cart and take to their feet.

" The great question, Mehban, is this : can we subsist on the country ? "

" There are sure to be a few Bhil habitations, Sahib, but these low people are very treacherous, great robbers, and live on offal. Give me the name of an important place, well the other side of the lake, which will furnish me with an excuse for making inquiries."

Bobbie, referring to his map, discovered a place marked Mandesur about one hundred miles away, to reach which they would have to skirt one or other sides of the lake.

" That will do, Sahib. I will make inquiries, but we must remain here to-morrow."

The next morning Mehban returned with the news that although cart roads were non-existent there were several footpaths through the jungle ; that very little food could be obtained, and that any attempt to reach Mandesur through the jungle was hazardous on account of wild animals and thieving Bhils.

" It will be very difficult, Sahib, to attempt what you propose, especially as you are not yet very strong : you had much better return when the Sirkar can deal with the matter by sending troops."

" That's no use, Mehban : with all this disturbance in the country the Government will not bother about two sahibas who have been so foolish as to

expose themselves to such risks. We must find Miss Chapman and her companion ; to-morrow, having discharged the bullock cart, we shall set out. We will take what food we can, trusting to luck."

" We shall both die, Sahib, but that does not matter."

" No, we shan't, Mehban ; we'll both live to be hanged."

" The sahib speaks in parables I do not understand."

The bullock cart driver was entrusted with a note to Major Gresson informing the latter why Lieutenant Ritchie was overstaying his leave.

" That will give them something to think and talk about," reflected Bobby, smiling, as he pictured to himself his Major's chagrin at the loss of the eight or nine pounders.

Ritchie with his faithful henchman set out on their quest. Whenever they topped some high ground one or the other climbed a tree to view the country. As the old fisherman had predicted, the lake had many sides with long arms running back into the jungle-covered hills, to turn which meant making several detours, but by the evening Bobby judged they had covered about fifteen miles.

They halted for the night, making their bivouac on a small promontory for security's sake. They had not set eyes on a single human being. Thus they continued for two days. Fortunately they came on a Bhil settlement where they were able to replenish their almost exhausted stock of food. They had seen plenty of game but to use the Mauser was dangerous as the noise might attract attention.

Inquiries failed to produce any information of any place likely to be harbouring Mary.

By the third day Bobby estimated they had reached the far side of the lake. They therefore came down to the water's edge with the forlorn hope of seeing if there were any traces of those they sought.

Climbing a high promontory he was just able to discern, through his binoculars, the crenulated battlements of Hamirgarh at the opposite end of the lake.

"Well," he remarked to Mehban, "we know where we are."

"Yes, Sahib, but we have always known that ; what we want to know is where the others are. I can see no sign of anyone ever having been here."

"You are becoming cynical as well as pessimistic, Mehban," laughed his master. "You must reassert your national trait of infinite patience. The Rajah has good reason to conceal his retreat : it may take us some time to find it."

"True, Huzoor, but to-morrow we must first of all find food as we have only enough for a small meal left."

"It is extraordinary, Mehban, having seen no one : has the Rajah deported all the folk who, we were told, lived in these parts."

"Who can tell, Sahib ? The ways of the great are inscrutable."

"We had better scout round for some shikar," observed Bobby. "I don't like letting off my Mauser, but we must have food."

They had not gone far when Mehban stopped suddenly, making a sign to listen. They both distinguished the sound of someone chopping wood at a distance. Cautiously they made their way in the direction whence came the unmistakable cadence, and were rewarded by finding an aged Bhil busy cutting up small logs. For some minutes they watched him from cover. Eventually Mehban whispered to Bobby to stay where he was while he himself accosted the man.

Bobby watched him as he approached the wood-cutter who, oblivious that anyone was near at hand, started violently as Mehban confronted him, and was about to dash into the forest, when the latter said something which allayed his fears.

The servant seating himself on the logs began to talk. After an hour's gesticulation and pointing he left the Bhil at his woodcutting and returned to Bobby and signed to him to follow. As soon as they were at a safe distance for conversation, Mehban repeated what he had heard.

"A piece of good luck meeting that man, Sahib," he said. "He tells me he has received orders to cut firewood daily for the Rajah who is believed to be in a fort on the lake : whether the sahibas are there or not remains to be found out ; the old man knows nothing : he does not even know if the Rajah is in residence. There is a small Bhil settlement close by, from which we can probably get food. If we succeed in securing that and shelter we must think out what is to be done next."

Bobby decided to visit the settlement. It would be difficult to maintain his disguise with prying eyes about him, but there was nothing else to be done for the moment—food and shelter must be obtained at once, or both of them would get seriously ill.

They followed a track which the woodcutter had pointed out, and having gone about three miles came upon a deserted hut.

"The very thing," remarked Bobby.

He was just about to add to his words when his servant plucked his sleeve making signs to him to keep silent. Bobby peered about him but could see nothing. Suddenly he heard a twang ; an arrow whizzed past him burying its point in a neighbouring tree. His hand went to the pistol concealed amidst the voluminous folds of his clothes, but the resourceful Mehban proceeded to make some mystic signs, and at once several short hideous hirsute creatures, veritable wild men of the woods, appeared around them. One of them who looked more intelligent than the others stepped forward to address Mehban.

It was evident that the two understood one another, notwithstanding a use of their arms which

would have gained merit from an instructor in physical culture.

After some minutes of this, Mehban, signed to Bobby to follow, and the party set off. A mile brought them to a collection of hovels, round the entrances to which were congregated sundry women, children and dogs. Bobby shuddered at the verminous looking scene. He and his servant were conducted to the hut, but its interior, however, was reasonably clean : there their hosts left them for a few minutes in order—so Mehban whispered—to procure some food.

The Bhil who had acted as spokesman soon returned, bringing with him a vessel of milk and some mysterious looking edibles.

Whilst master and servant ate the food, the man who had brought it squatted in the corner of the hut. When the meal was finished, he started a lengthy colloquy with Mehban, quite incomprehensible to Bobby, who, by the time it had ended was almost asleep. As soon as they were alone, Mehban requested permission to repeat what he had heard.

“ First, Sahib, this business of your pretending to be a deaf mute must cease—it causes complications by our having to take too many precautions. I have told these people, therefore, that you are a kinsman who is afflicted by an impediment in your speech. As none of them know the English language you can talk to me in their hearing, but only a little. I have also said that we have lost our way in trying to get to Mandesur, a place they have never heard of ; that you have been suffering from fever and must stay here a few days to recuperate.

“ Secondly, these people hate the Rajah. The latter evidently came to these parts only a few days ago, and in order to be sure of getting certain supplies, such as milk and fire-wood, seized two of them as hostages. They shot the arrow at us because, so they say, they thought we were emissaries of the

Rajah. I think with their assistance we shall be able to find out the whereabouts of the sahibas. I will go with the party to-morrow to see if there are any clues. The wood and milk are taken daily to the lake where a boat comes to collect them."

"Again, you have done well, Mehban," replied Bobby, "now let us sleep; I am very tired."

Mehban, curtailing his morning devotions, went off at dawn on his quest, whilst his master, who had to simulate indisposition by remaining in the stuffy hut became very bored. The latter managed, however, to derive some measure of interest and amusement from studying through the doorless doorway sundry Bhil domestic activities, amongst which in particular he noticed a youth carving cubist-like inscriptions on the rind of the large water melon.

Mehban returned about sunset with the news that he had been down to the edge of the lake; that the wood and other things had been deposited in a boat which had then pulled out and disappeared round a promontory. He had climbed a high piece of ground overlooking the water from which he had been able to get a good view, but he could see no boat nor any island on which there were any buildings."

"Not very hopeful," commented Bobby, "but we must think out something: I will sleep on it."

CHAPTER VIII

A MESSAGE IN MELONS

" Sahib, Sahib," reiterated Mehban, as he endeavoured to rouse his sleepy employer. " It is after seven o'clock ; the hour for prayer is already passed.

Bobby grunted, and turning over on his couch of dried leaves, seemed unlikely to be awakened by Mehban's call to devotional exercises.

Sahib, I have great news," he proceeded. " The sahibas are in some place not far away."

Bobby woke up.

" And how have you come by this information, Mehban ? We are not in Fleet Street."

" No, Sahib, I do not understand your Honour's joke, but an order came last night that jungle fowl and fruit were demanded by the Rajah : who could want such things but the sahib log."

" The fowl sounds intriguing, but anyone might want fruit," remarked Bobby. " Still, you are a discerning fellow, Mehban, although you will agree with me that you could not hang a man on such evidence."

" No, Sahib, but we can make plans on the assumption : you must turn the demand for these jungle fowl to account."

" I can't impersonate a dead fowl, nor a mango, Mehban. Even if the sahibas are near at hand we do not yet know the place. I will now think hard whilst you get hazari ready."

Bobby cudgelled his brains. Suddenly an idea came to him which struck him as worth trying.

" Mehban ! O Mehban, come hither ! " he cried. " Get me some good water melons if you can, medium size, but get them now before our morning meal. That can wait."

Whilst his servant went off to carry out the order, his master busied himself drawing sundry sketches in his pocket book.

As soon as the melons arrived he set to work practising on one until reminded by Mehban that the morning meal was ready.

Hastily he consumed the nauseating mess, washing it down with a draught of milk, then resumed his absorbing task.

He found it quite easy to give effect to his idea, namely, by carefully peeling off the outer green skin, to reproduce a crude picture. He therefore did one of himself in shorts on two carefully selected melons, working in his initials R. R.

The final result seemed sufficiently like the indigenous product to arouse no suspicion unless minutely scrutinised, but in order to baffle undue curiosity, he added one or two melons on which he carved the designs he had seen during the morning.

When he had engraved six to his satisfaction he called Mehban, and showing them to him asked if he recognised what was on them.

The servant examined them carefully holding the fruit at every conceivable angle.

"Without doubt, Sahib, there is a picture of a man, but what kind of man I do not know."

"Excellent," said Bobby, "now next time when these good people take anything to the boat, these six melons are to be included. If the sahibas are persons to whom these things go, as you suggest, then perhaps they will be given one of these melons to eat; if so, one of them will recognise that figure. Do you comprehend?"

"Certainly, Sahib, but I do not see how you will ever know that they have recognised the picture."

"Ah, that stumps you, does it? So it does me; all the same, get the melons away before my picture becomes decomposed: and see that they are not

knocked about. I shall now have acute fever for twenty-four hours."

When Mehban returned in the evening he was evidently greatly excited.

"Sahib, I have made many strange discoveries. I watched the melons being placed in the boat, then ran as fast as I could through the jungle to a high piece of ground, but not the same as that to which I went last time. From this place, where I arrived quite quickly, I was able to see round the promontory which had shut out the view of the boat yesterday."

I saw the boat continue across the lake to an island where it disappeared. Behind me was a higher hill up which I climbed. When I reached the top, I saw not one lake, but two, one large, one small, and in the centre of the smaller one was an island fort. This smaller lake is probably part of the larger one, but I could not see the connecting piece of water."

"To-morrow, Sahib, your fever must be gone, then you will accompany me to the hill in order to judge for yourself. The sahibas are in that Fort."

"Shabash, Mehban : I shall be thankful to consider myself recovered."

The next morning they set out together. The lakes were as described by Mehban. Bobby carefully scrutinised both islands through his glasses, making some notes in his pocket book.

"That will do for to-day," he observed, as he put away his glasses ; "I think there is a small temple on the Island where the boat disappeared."

Immediately they got back, he sent Mehban to fetch some more melons, and in under an hour he had carved on two a tolerable representation of the Island Fort. He also marked the four points of the compass, scribbled *fire* on the North side of the lake, and *light* above the fort with an arrow leading to the

badly executed drawing of a window. As before he added one or two more melons bearing native drawings.

"These must go with the supplies to-morrow, Mehban."

"Certainly, Sahib, but why not write a note and put it inside the melon?"

"Very bad for you, my servant. We do not know for certain whether the sahibas are on that island; even if they are, they may not get the fruit. If the servants ate them they would see my note and raise an alarm, with the result that the sahibas would be closely watched or moved elsewhere. If they are there and they receive these melons, we shall soon get a sign, but we must move to some place where we can keep a watch on that Island Fort. Try to find out if there are any habitations on or near the shore of the smaller lake. You can say that I am not yet well enough to travel, but that I must get away from the village as the dogs keep me awake at night, or any other lie which sounds plausible. Now I shall have fever again."

Mehban was absent for some hours: when he returned he had to wake his master.

"There are two or three dilapidated huts near the edge of the lake. To-morrow we can move there, also I have arranged with the head man to send us food should we decide to occupy them."

Changing quarters was not a difficult operation. They walked over carrying their few belongings, not omitting some melons carried by Bhils.

Their new dwelling was a rough woodsman's hut thatched with reeds. It was set about three hundred yards from the edge of the lake, but commanded a good view of the Island Fort about one mile distant.

"I intend to keep a close watch on the Island from dawn until midnight, anyhow for a few days," declared Bobby, after a close inspection of the sur-

roundings. "I will begin to-night. I want you to collect enough wood to make a fire."

After a frugal supper Bobby took post near the spot selected for making the fire, and the vigil commenced.

The lake was enveloped by that intense darkness so noticeable in India during the monsoon season when the sky is overcast by dense masses of cloud : fortunately no rain was falling, a circumstance which made the night an ideal one for seeing any lights ; but none were visible.

Bobby, with difficulty, managed to keep himself awake by attention to the fire. After two hours had passed he began to doubt if anybody could be on the Fort at all—it seemed incredible that no lights were permitted. Probably the captives were in rooms the windows of which did not face towards him. After all why should he expect to see any lights. It was long after the hour when the average Indian goes to rest ; consequently the only possible chance of seeing a light would be if Mary and Mrs. Roberts happened to sit up a little while in a room facing towards him.

That they had received the melons and interpreted aright the pictures, seemed almost too much to expect.

The hours dragged on : he was about to turn in when Mehban touched him on the arm, saying :

"I think I can see a very faint light, Sahib."

Bobby fixed his gaze in the direction of the Fort but could discern nothing.

"Shut your eyes for a few moments, Sahib, then open them again."

This he did, and on doing so noticed a very slight glimmer which might have been one of those transitory effects not unusual when opening the eyes in complete darkness.

"Bring my glasses," he ordered.

After a few minutes the light became better : then

was suddenly extinguished. Again it appeared to be again distinguished. This was repeated two or three times.

"Brighten up the fire, Mehban, then bring me out that old blanket."

Bobby taking one end of the blanket and his servant the other, they stretched it in front of the freshly kindled fire. They then lowered it for a few seconds and again raised it, at the same time keeping their eyes in the direction of the Fort. After the third attempt, the distant light again re-appeared. Again Bobby repeated the process ; again the light showed.

"They are there, Sahib, that is not an accident ; it is in answer to the picture message conveyed by the melons."

"Bring my electric torch, Mehban," commanded Bobby excitedly.

"Is that wise, Sahib ? The Bhils often light fires like this, but the torch is different ; it's peculiar light may be noticed."

"I don't care a damn, Mehban, we will risk it, if only to put the matter beyond doubt. If Mrs. Roberts is with the Sahiba then she may understand, as her husband knows about this signalling business, if she doesn't, then we must think out something else. Arrange the blanket so as to screen the fire."

The torch having been produced, Bobby propped it up on a high stone carefully aligning it on the Fort ; he then made the usual *call up* signal.

Almost at once the light was shown.

"That means someone there understands that much," commented Bobby.

Very deliberately he began to spell out the following message in Morse :—

"I am here with servant—Ritchie."

The "I" at once received acknowledgment, also each word in succession after one or two repetitions.

Having finished the message, he waited but no reply came.

"No means for sending, I expect," muttered Bobby to himself. "I'll try another."

Again he called up and was acknowledged.

"Be ready to-morrow same hour, good-night."

This time to his surprise and delight he detected the unmistakable if indistinct shaky cadence of a morse reply. Acknowledging, he hastily snatched up his glasses to read.

"Both here well, but closely guarded. Tired. Good-night."

Bobby turned triumphantly to his servant, saying :—

"We can now talk to the sahibas ; soon I hope we shall be able to arrange their release."

CHAPTER IX

A JOY RIDE

"A real adventure," remarked Mary, as rounding a bend in the road, the last glimpse of Sukanundi was blotted out. "Up with the blinds and down with the windows," she cried.

"What a glorious day," commented her companion, as the soft, cool, moist morning air blew in her face, "and how refreshing and green everything looks after rain. These babbling streams remind me of England."

"Yes, isn't it superb?" assented Mary, "and what a relief to escape if only for a few hours from Sukanundi. I do hope the expedition won't lead to your getting into trouble, as, of course, it will leak out that we went joy riding in the Rajah's car."

"As long as we are back by to-morrow evening I don't think any questions will be asked," replied Mrs. Roberts, "but if a hitch occurs, then like all adventurous projects which go astray, it will meet with censure: but look at that cascade tumbling down the side of the hill! Could anything be more beautiful?"

Bump, bump, and suddenly the car stopped.

"I wonder what that is," said Mary putting her head out of the window.

"Oh, the road has been scoured away for a few yards. I suppose we shall have to wait whilst they move some of the larger rocks; let's get out."

The Rajah had also descended, and seeing Mary came up.

"Good morning, Miss Chapman. I am afraid there will be a slight delay, but nothing serious."

"It's worth any delay, Rajah Sahib, with such lovely scenery all round one," replied Mary. "This is Mrs. Roberts," she continued. "She kindly consented to accompany me."

The Rajah held out his hand.

"I am much indebted to you," he said, "and hope you have not been put to any inconvenience. We ought to arrive about 2 o'clock unless we are held up by other wash aways."

"I think, Rajah Sahib, I and Mrs. Roberts might eat a few sandwiches while waiting for the road repairs."

"Just as you like, Miss Chapman. Will you select the place; I will then order the driver to put the basket there: you will excuse me from joining you as I am never present at meals except with my own caste folk."

Whilst eating their repast under the shade of a tree, Mary asked Mrs. Roberts what she thought of their host.

"There is a sinister look about him I do not like; his eyes have a snaky look. Why do you ask?"

"To hear first impressions—sometimes correct, but often erroneous; however, I see the road is clear so we must rejoin our car."

The jungle became denser, the view on either side being restricted by a wall of almost impenetrable foliage, whilst ahead the route could only be seen for a short distance as it made its sinuous way through a veritable tunnel of verdure.

Once or twice they came upon clearings where a few miserable huts were clustered together, out of which emerged hideous, almost naked creatures, who gazed at the passing cars with a mixture of awe and apathy.

"The passing of some strange deities," commented Mrs. Roberts. "What terribly ugly and malevolent expressions these people have."

"Ugly, yes," agreed Mary, "but not malevolent:

that scowl isn't one of hatred, it's a facial characteristic. I am told they are quite friendly."

"I'd prefer not to test it, Miss Chapman. I am, perhaps, prejudiced by my life-long contact with our pleasant-faced boys in the Army: there is something about the average young British soldier's bearing and features which bear the stamp of what I consider knighthood."

Mary laughed.

"You think they ought all to be Sir Thomas Atkins. I wonder what Mr. Kipling would say to that."

"He'd agree, especially if he knew the new Army as well as he did the old. I know the present generation of young soldiers probably better than most of my sex, and when I say that they are wonderful, I really mean it. You, Miss Chapman, come from the public school class which gives us our officers. I have nothing against them, beyond that they lay claim to a monopoly of the virtues. If you exclude the polish which their education gives them, they have, if anything, less virtues than the men: they certainly have less temptations to go astray."

"That's what Mr. Ritchie is always saying."

"Well, he knows, Miss Chapman. Our men are the real knights of Britain. The personnel of other armies are good enough fellows, I daresay, but they lack that distinction which makes ours stand out so conspicuously. Probably our Naval ratings are similarly endowed, but they are not brought into contact with their fellow-countrymen to the same extent. As to all these black people, they appear to me half animals."

"Of all the downright Rule Britanniaites, I think you are the most thorough-going one, Mrs. Roberts."

"Perhaps, but I am proud of the compliment. Every note and word of Rule Britannia thrills me, and makes me thank God I am British."

"Such sentiments do not help forward the League of Nations idea, Mrs. Roberts."

"I daresay not. I am only a plain woman of the people with a smattering of self-education, but I don't believe in the League, so there is no call to alter my sentiments. Those who consider universal peace as a possibility are deluded fools."

"That means," interrupted Mary, "you don't think the human brain can rise above the instinct of the animal."

"It is because it does rise above the instinct of the animal that we have war, Miss Chapman. The animal fight is usually an individualistic affair, brought about by chance on the spur of the moment. Tigers do not band themselves together to fight tigers, nor any other species. Since the human brain has created war as distinct from mere combats between individuals which are instinctive, is it likely that it will revert to the single combat idea as you and others suggest? I am certain it won't. Clever, well educated people tell me that war is a biological necessity. There is nothing biological about organised war that I can see, nevertheless it is one of those things inherited from the tree of knowledge.

"Then you don't think the human brain is susceptible to change?" inquired Mary.

No. The most gifted nations are those most given to organised warfare. I look upon all these pacts as mawkish hypocrisy. Do you seriously think, Miss Chapman, that the present map of the world will remain as it is for ever, and if not, what will alter the frontiers. It will not be done by lawyers, but by strong men such as Italy's Dictator, or Kemal Pashas."

"What a torrent of comment the sight of those wretched woodsmen has called forth," jestingly remarked Mary: "we are already miles away from the poor things, indeed ought to be nearing our destination—what's the name? Oh, I remember, Hamirgarh."

The jungle, however, seemed endless. Occasion-

ally the cars passed over some eminence bare of trees disclosing a vast sea of undulating foliage. At last the landscape began to open out ; some odd patches of cultivation appeared, finally a few miserable huts became discernible behind which towered the loop-holed walls of a venerable fort.

The cars crossed over a moat by means of a dilapidated drawbridge, passed through a turretted portcullis where two ill-dressed sentries stood slovenly to arms, and drew up in a great quadrangle.

Not very different from Bheemgarh, thought Mary as she looked out upon the scene.

The Rajah, as he emerged from his limousine was at once surrounded by salaaming menials. Having issued some orders he came over to Mary's car and opened the door.

" Welcome to my fortress of Hamirgarh, ladies," he said. " So far as I am aware, you are the first Englishwomen to enter its portals."

Mary and Mrs. Roberts got out.

" What a romantic-looking place, Rajah Sahib ; " you must tell us its history," said Mrs. Roberts.

" Yes, indeed you must," chimed in Mary.

" I don't think you would appreciate it much," replied their host. " There is a saying that those who enter it, other than the ruler, never quit it. Its dungeon walls could, if they had speech, tell dreadful tales. Let us hope that for once Hamirgarh may be able to refute its sinister reputation. Allow me to conduct you to your apartments."

Here again the conditions encountered were much the same as those prevailing at Bheemgarh—dismal passages, flights of stone stairways, scanty furniture.

The Rajah left them at the door of their rooms, where two serving women appeared to tender to their wants.

" When you have rested and had tea," remarked their host, as he was leaving, " would you care to go on the lake in one of my motor boats ? "

"We'd love to," said Mary. "Shall we say 5.30?"

"That will suit me admirably, and give time for the sun to lose some of its fierceness : now that the rain has clarified the air, the rays are very penetrating. Please bring your sun hats. Au revoir."

Left to themselves Mary and Mrs. Roberts opened up their few belongings, then looked over their place of abode. It comprised a sitting-room opening off a passage on the opposite side of which were situated their two bedrooms—large, but stuffy, owing to lack of ventilation. The furniture consisted of a charpoy bed and a couple of camp chairs and tables.

Having washed and tidied themselves up, both repaired to the sitting-room, where a thoroughly British tea was awaiting them.

"It's curious," remarked Mary, "how Indians manage to hit off the tea business, seeing what a mess they make as a rule of other meals."

"They have more ocular experience of our teas, I expect, Miss Chapman ; besides very little cooking is required, but really I think Indians are very clever at catering for our wants."

"In Cantonments, or the large cities, I agree," replied Mary, "but in out-of-the-way places like this, their culinary efforts, except as regards tea, are apt to be bizarre."

When they had finished, Mary called up one of the women, telling her they were ready for the trip on the lake. The woman disappeared for a few minutes, returning with the information that everything was ready, and that she would conduct them to the boat.

They found a neat, clean, and well-appointed motor launch moored to the side of a small basin situated inside the fort. The Rajah, who was standing on the quay beside it, handed them to their seats. The engine having been set going, they shot out under a gated archway on to the lake, and across its

calm waters they were soon speeding at ten or twelve knots.

"Well, Miss Chapman, don't you think your journey was well worth while?" inquired the Rajah.

"Indeed, I do," assented Mary. "The lake is far more beautiful than I imagined it would be, but, of course, I have never been in Kashmir or Udaipur."

"Their lakes are also very beautiful, but in quite a different way," said the Rajah. "This one owes its charm to its vastness and wild setting; but look, we are approaching an island. On it is a temple where the priests in attendance have lived for years without ever quitting it. Can you imagine a more ideal spot for seclusion from the world?"

Having made a circuit of the island, they headed for some precipitous cliffs rising sheer from the water, forming apparently, an impenetrable barrier of black basaltic rock. The launch made a sharp turn towards what looked like a cleft in the mighty escarpment; the helm went over again, in obedience to which they glided into what appeared to be a cavern and stopped.

Simultaneously with the lights being switched on, Mary heard the sound of gurgling water; she also noticed that two massive doors had closed behind them.

"What are we doing, Rajah?" she inquired.

"We are in a small lock; if you look carefully you will notice that we are rising; in a minute or so we shall proceed."

Two doors slowly swung open before them, disclosing a tunnel. The engine throbbed and they began to thread their way forward. Suddenly, right ahead there appeared a tiny point of light which rapidly expanded until it revealed itself as an opening. In a moment they had passed into daylight.

"More romance!" exclaimed Mary, in raptures, as she gazed at another great expanse of water in the midst of which stood an island fort.

" Is this lake part of the other one, Rajah Sahib? "

" It is and it isn't," he replied, " by nature they were separated, but my father joined them by that tunnel and lock which you have just come through."

" I'd like to spend weeks exploring here instead of having to return to that stuffy Sukanundi to-morrow," said Mary. " What other surprises have you, Rajah—perhaps an underground lake—it is all like a fairy tale."

" Why should you return to-morrow? " inquired the Rajah. " Permit me to enjoy your company for a few days now that you are here."

" That's impossible, Rajah Sahib; we must get back to-morrow evening, or there will be a tremendous hullabaloo; but do take us up to and around that island castle. How does one get in? I can see no door."

" I'm afraid there isn't time to-day," replied their host, " it is much farther off than it looks. We must now return, but on the way I will show you one more of our mysteries."

The launch turned away from the Fort, and ran about half a mile at full speed, then slowing down, finally stopped.

" Look ladies," exclaimed the Rajah, " one of our awe-inspiring wonders."

The boat was on the fringe of swirling waters. The engine was reversed for a few revolutions, then stopped, but immediately the launch was drawn forward again.

" Stand up for a moment, Miss Chapman; now look right ahead."

A few hundred yards in front could be discerned a mighty whirlpool from the centre of which came an ominous roar.

The craft, seized by the eddies, was being drawn sideways, yet forward, with ever increasing rapidity, until suddenly it swerved round with its stern pointing towards the whirling mass of waters. The Rajah

waved his arm, then just as the launch seemed about to be engulfed, the seething vortex ceased. In under a minute they were riding on calm waters.

Mary, spellbound by wonder and apprehension, gazed around her in bewilderment till jerked back to realities by hearing Mrs. Roberts' matter-of-fact remark.

"I call that an uncanny and disconcerting experience, Rajah."

"Yes," he assented, "an unpleasant kind of surprise to encounter if unprepared for it. Even if in a good-sized boat the chances are against getting out if once really caught by the current. There are three others but this is the largest. You have a proverb about avoiding Scylla and falling into Charybdis, that is so? Here we have several practical demonstrations of the real thing with added variations."

"But do explain to us what causes this unheard of phenomenon," asked Mary.

"Ah," replied their host, "that is one of the closely guarded secrets of Hamirgarh. Now let us get home."

The sun was just setting, tinting the jungle-covered hills to a bronze-like green and converting the surface of the lake into a veritable fleece of gold.

It was quite dark by the time they reached Hamirgarh. Their host accompanied them to the threshold of their apartments where he bade them good-night.

An excellent dinner awaited them, to which they did ample justice, but, as soon as the coffee was finished Mary proposed bed—the long day in the open air had thoroughly tired her out. She felt overwhelmed by an intense sleepiness.

CHAPTER X

IMPRISONED GUESTS

Mary's slumbers was disturbed by vague dreams of ever-changing subjects : her awakening a prolonged half-consciousness relapsing into renewed dreamland.

The first tangible object of which she became aware was one of the serving woman standing beside her saying *chota hazari* was ready.

Feeling slightly numbed she pinched herself in order to make certain that she was not dreaming. Surrounding objects whilst familiar, seemed different ; the door appeared to be in another place. Perhaps the bed had been moved before she had gone to rest, and, tired out, she had not noticed it.

No, the windows *were* different ! What could this mean ? She sat up and gazed about her. Either she was suffering from an hallucination or she was in another room. She glanced at the tea service ; it was the same that had been used at afternoon tea. She called the woman to her, but lack of knowledge of the language was a hopeless impediment to intelligent inquiries. The woman merely shook her head, or by signs, indicated complete absence of comprehension.

Mary began to feel alarmed, but poured out and drank a cup of tea whilst pondering on events. Perhaps she had taken Mrs. Roberts' room : no, that solution did not fit, as her few belongings were about. She was still trying to unravel the problem when Mrs. Roberts arrayed in a dressing gown, and looking very agitated, burst into the room.

" Thank God you are here, Miss Chapman. That

dirty scoundrel of a Rajah has, I believe, kidnapped us. They must have drugged the coffee or something, for we have been moved during the night. We are in other rooms but whether in Hamirgarh or not I can't say, as I cannot see out. I wish I had never come : I knew it wasn't safe : what shall we do now that we are in that reprobate's clutches ? "

Having delivered herself of this outburst, Mrs. Roberts almost broke down. Mary, although thoroughly frightened herself, attempted to calm her companion, and managed to restore some degree of composure.

" It is no use giving way to despair, Mrs. Roberts," she said kindly ; " even Rajahs don't abduct Englishwomen. At least if they do so, it is at great price. Let's dress, get breakfast—if there is any—then reconnoitre. Where is your room ? "

" Next door ; I will dress and return here at once."

Hot baths were ready, in fact everything seemed exactly as it should be except for their rooms. " Perhaps," thought Mary, " it is some practical joke. These oriental despots are rarely normal, and their sense of humour is often perverted."

Mrs. Roberts rejoined Mary in a few minutes : it was quite evident that a hot bath had exercised no tranquilizing effect on her. Mary deliberately dallied over her dressing in order to give time for breakfast, which she had ordered, to be served.

" I refuse to be rattled until I discover something really menacing, Mrs. Roberts," she remarked as she put some finishing touches to her toilet.

" Something menacing, Miss Chapman ! " echoed Mrs. Roberts. " If the drugging of two women, and their removal whilst unconscious isn't a menace, then I don't quite know what you consider is the meaning of the word."

" Well," replied Mary lazily, " we have suffered no harm so far beyond feeling a bit groggy when we woke up."

"But think of the humiliation of being moved about in our night attire by all kinds of dreadful people : I consider it infamous as well as menacing," retorted Mrs. Roberts.

"If that is all we have to worry about I am not very much concerned : just think of the people who view one in an operating theatre—with not even nighties, mind you," laughed Mary.

At this juncture the servant announced that hazari was ready. They followed the woman along a narrow crooked passage, up a short flight of steps, and into a room which received its light from half a dozen small windows placed close to the roof.

The table was well laid with all the usual appointments of an English breakfast. The food consisted of an excellent fish kedgerie followed by scrambled eggs.

"Not much amiss here," remarked Mary ; " we must await developments."

Having finished, she suggested a tour of inspection. They first of all explored the passage. It came to a dead end. There existed neither a stairway nor any proper exit except for a very small sort of wicket such as one sees let into large doors, leading presumably to the servants' quarters and kitchen. It was securely fastened.

How had they and the few bits of furniture—the same as what they had used the day before—been got in ?

The bedrooms were next examined. Here they discovered a small massive door which evidently gave admission to the two bathrooms situated side by side. It was also securely fastened and from its appearance had not been recently opened.

The small windows, like those in the breakfast room, were too high up to see out of even if one stood a chair on the table.

"I give it up," said Mary ; " we must wait and see, but we will have both the beds put in one room ;

I think mine for choice, as it is on the North side evidently, which will be the coolest. Now what shall we say should the Rajah put in an appearance ? ”

“ The infamous brute,” remarked Mrs. Roberts heatedly. “ I will give him a piece of my mind if he dares to show himself.”

“ Listen to me, Mrs. Roberts ; I’ve got you into this scrape, and so it is up to me to handle it. As matters stand at present we must tread warily. The Rajah’s action last night certainly looks suspicious, although what his motive can be I do not know. Anyhow, you must let me do the talking if he comes.”

“ Very well,” assented Mrs. Roberts, “ but I make one condition. I am to be present at any interview you may have with him or any of his emissaries ; I also reserve my right as your elder, by some years to speak my mind. As the wife of a British Non-Commissioned Officer I am not going to allow myself to be trapped like this without a protest.”

“ Protesting won’t be of much avail,” interrupted Mary impatiently, “ if, as I believe, the man is mentally deranged ; our only chance is, as I have said, to temporize with him until his sanity returns, but hush, I hear the sounds of wavelets lapping against stones.”

“ That means we have been moved to some room nearer the lake,” suggested Mrs. Roberts ; “ we were too far distant from the water in our last ones to hear such a sound.”

“ There was no building containing rooms of this size anywhere near the water’s edge at Hamirgarh that I can recall—just the outer rampart wall ” put in Mary. “ I believe we must have been moved to another place ; anything might have happened during those eight hours’ drugged slumber.”

“ And you still don’t think *that* a menacing situation, Miss Chapman ? ”

“ It is certainly a very disturbing thought.”

“ We may remain captives months and months,”

wailed Mrs. Roberts on the borderland of another breakdown. "No one knows where we are and with all this disturbance in the country no one will care."

"I expect that is what our captor is counting on; but he is wrong. So are you. I am quite certain that when we do not arrive back to-day urgent steps will be taken to trace our whereabouts—it will be an easy matter to track the cars to Hamirgarh. We shall have to think of something to do in order to occupy our time, but as I have said before, I am not going to be rattled. Do you play Mah Jong?"

"Do I look like one who does?" retorted Mrs. Roberts curtly.

"For some inexplicable reason my servant packed the game in my suit case, either by mistake for something else, or because I did once tell him it was to accompany me everywhere I went in India. You must learn, Mrs. Roberts. I will fetch the game now and start explaining it—with the aid of the book—for to tell you the truth I know very little more about it than you do."

Mary having fetched the box laid out the pieces, being busily engaged in checking them off when a servant entered to say the Rajah Sahib wished to speak with Miss Chapman.

"Ha! I thought so," remarked Mary; "where is he?"

"In the room you used for *hazari*."

"Show us the way."

The woman made a gesture to restrain Mrs. Roberts, but the latter pushed her aside.

They found the Rajah seated on one of the chairs. He seemed to be ill at ease, but rose as they entered. For a moment no one spoke.

Mary was the first to break the silence.

"I presume you have come to offer explanations for the outrageous treatment we underwent last night."

"I asked to see you alone, Miss Chapman," he replied.

"That I cannot agree to, Rajah. You may remember that one of the conditions I made was that Mrs. Roberts would accompany me everywhere."

The Rajah pondered for a minute.

"Yesterday you expressed a wish to stay here a month," he said. "I have taken you at your word. You will now be exonerated—I think that is the word—as I have taken steps to prevent your return. In other words you are my prisoners."

"Perhaps you are trying to be facetious—if you understand the word—but that is no reason," she protested, "for the infamous treatment you subjected us to by drugging and exposing us to a move by night. I think you have lost your senses." Then hesitating for a moment, she continued, "I demand our instant release and return to Sukanundi. If you comply with my request I will see that suitable explanations are offered to account for our late return—as I do not know where we are, and it may be impossible to get back to-day."

The Rajah smiled maliciously.

"Whatever you may think of my actions," he said, "I have no intention of doing as you ask. Let me tell you, ladies, that according to reports from my spies things are not going too well for the British cause: at any moment the refugees at Sukanundi may be in great peril. You are safer here."

"We are the best judges of that," said Mary angrily.

"Like most of your kind, you are a treacherous scoundrel, Sir," interrupted Mrs. Roberts.

"Be silent, woman, or I shall take steps to curb your tongue." Then addressing Mary, he continued: "Recollect that you are in the hands of an autocratic ruler whose word is law. Provided you make no disturbance you will be treated well—far better

than other women of my Zenana—I have made suitable arrangements."

"I congratulate you, Sir, on your magnanimous treatment of two defenceless women who have been foolish enough to accept your hospitality; but think carefully before you disregard my offer. Wise and more experienced men than you have thought, to their cost, that the British Empire was down and out: I think however we had better end this interview."

"I think so too," replied their captor; "we orientals look at these matters in a different light from you English. Our whims or caprices occupy a more important place in our life than our mature judgments. For the present I leave you in captivity. A time may come, Miss Chapman, when you may be prepared to barter your freedom on my terms. Adieu."

He passed out through the wicket used by the servants.

"Infamous scoundrel," repeated Mrs. Roberts almost hysterically as he left the room. What shall we do?"

"Become experts in Mah Jong," replied Mary with a tremulous laugh."

The strain of adjusting themselves to the first seven days' seclusion was intense. They had brought no books or needlework: time hung heavily on their hands—the worst form of boredom stared them in the face.

The meals were good and well served with a plentiful supply of seasonable fruit, amongst which figured mangoes and the familiar water melons.

On the eighth day of their imprisonment Mrs. Roberts drew Mary's attention to the curious designs carved in the rind of two melons placed on the breakfast table. They had not noticed them before.

More to please her companion than for any other reason Mary looked at them and was turning them

over when she suddenly started, looked round to see if any of the servants were present, then in an undertone said : " Most extraordinary. Do look at this one. What do you make of it ? "

Mrs. Roberts scrutinised the melon in question.

" It looks like a bad representation of a British soldier in shorts leaning on a stick."

" Exactly," agreed Mary ; " what is still more extraordinary the figure bears a distinct resemblance to Mr. Ritchie, who, as you know until quite recently has been using a stick."

Mary peered again at the grotesque outline.

" I am certain it is Mr. Ritchie. What can it mean ? "

" I should not jump to hasty conclusions," remarked Mrs. Roberts, again critically examining the drawings. " They might be anything, but as you say there is a sort of crude resemblance."

Mary's eyes sparkled with excitement.

" Can Mr. Ritchie have traced our whereabouts," she said, " and being unable to communicate with us, can he have sent these things to let us know ? "

" We must think things out, Miss Chapman ; even if there is nothing in it, it will give us something to talk about. We will tell the servant to keep them for the next meal—one's imagination plays queer pranks with one's judgment on occasions like this. We must be careful to show no interest whatever in the melons beyond a desire to eat them ; perhaps others may come giving further information."

As Mrs. Roberts had foretold, the subject gave them an inexhaustible topic of conversation.

At lunch both again critically examined the two melons when Mrs. Roberts triumphantly pointed out what looked like the bruised remains of R.R.

" That settles all doubt for me," said Mary decisively, " but let us see if there is anything else which has escaped our notice."

No melons in the universe ever underwent so close a scrutiny, but nothing further was revealed—on one was a mere collection of hieroglyphics.

"We had better eat one now to show that we appreciate them."

"There will be a lot of brain work to do in order to think out some way of acknowledging the message," remarked Mrs. Roberts. "I wonder if any of our windows are visible from the surrounding country, as if so, we might, by showing a light during darkness, convey some signals. My husband who was at one time in the signals taught me a lot. I am even able to read and send Morse slowly, and what is equally important, Mr. Ritchie has passed a course of signals. So if we could see out of the windows, and I could extemporise a lamp, we might even be able to establish communication. Let us examine these windows again. If we could but see out we might have some idea of where we are."

After lunch they made an inspection of their bedroom windows. There was only one way by which they could be reached, and this involved the lashing of the two charpoy bedsteads end to end, thus making a ladder of doubtful stability.

"We must wait for a moon, then make the attempt sometime about midnight when everyone is asleep," announced Mrs. Roberts. "These windows look North and East, those in my room South and West."

"There is a moon to-night, if only half a one, provided the clouds don't obscure it. Still we can experiment and if all goes well, await a favourable occasion."

Both were quite excited at the prospect of seeing the outer world. They went to bed at the usual hour, but neither slept. About midnight Mrs. Roberts whispered to Mary that they might now make the attempt.

"We had better not light a candle as the flame

might be seen from the outside—there is just enough moon-light to enable us to carry on."

The two charpoys were lashed together with the sheets, and then, after considerable difficulty reared on end under one of the windows.

"A rickety affair," commented Mary, "but provided the webbing holds I think I can get up if you will steady them—I am pretty agile. Besides pyjamas are more appropriate garments for this sort of job than nighties."

The webbing held firmly as she clambered up. To stand on the end farthest from the floor required some presence of mind—it was quite twelve feet and by no means steady—but she managed to do it, and was rewarded by getting a good view. An expanse of moon-lit water was before her, with a hilly shore indistinctly discernable in the offing. She imparted the news to her companion.

"We must now try the East window."

A similar view was obtainable—water and hills.

The beds were undone, carried to the other room, and observations made from the windows there—again water and hills.

"That settles one point," said Mrs. Roberts, "we are on an island which I daresay is the one we saw on the second lake to which the Rajah would not take us. How high do you think we are above the water?"

"About sixty feet I should say," answered Mary.

"Mr. Ritchie must at least suspect that we are here, consequently will keep the place under close observation. Someone, however, comes to the island with supplies, and that someone has brought the melons, Miss Chapman. Did you notice if any of the windows opened?"

"I think all do, but they are stuck fast," replied Mary.

"We must see if we cannot get one open. Now to remake the beds and get some sleep. These sheets

will require a little stretching to take the creases out."

Mary awoke early ; in spite of their midnight activities, she was consumed with a restless impatience at the prospect of further melon messages, so much so, that she could scarcely refrain from visiting the breakfast room before the meal was announced.

On the table were two melons. As soon as the servant withdrew, each grabbed one.

Mary's was slashed with strange devices which conveyed nothing to her, but Mrs. Roberts had scarcely glanced at hers when she said excitedly, " Yes, here is another scene depicting a castle in the middle of a lake—our prison I am sure—the points of the compass, and a blurred sort of arrow directed towards what looks like representations of windows in the castle."

Mary examined the crude sketch.

" Of course it means that Mr. Ritchie can see this place ; has somehow or other guessed we are here, and has been compelled to use this original method of letting us know ; but let us look again."

" I am sure," she continued, examining the drawing carefully, that the blob you see on the side of the lake means something, but look, Mrs. Roberts, there are the initials again."

Mrs. Roberts peered at the melon.

" I am inclined to think," she observed, " that the blob represents where he is, which means that the place can be seen from the North windows of this fort. There is something scribbled, but the writing has got mushed : the blob might mean a fire. I think we had better examine the other melon again, then eat some of both."

Neither of them could decipher the markings on the other one.

" Strange that on both occasions we have found

two melons on the table, one plainly understandable, the other incomprehensible," said Mary.

"I expect both convey information, if only we could tumble on the right key," commented Mrs. Roberts; "and besides, I intend to set up a light, and to do so must manage to scale that wobbly ladder."

"The light of two candles won't travel far," declared Mary.

"No, but a mile or so in clear weather, Miss Chapman. I intend requisitioning that ornate Mah Jong box of yours: there is nothing else; just think of the luck in having it, the sliding lid will be most useful. If Mr. Ritchie is on the look out, we might get an answering sign. I could then, perhaps, use your torch to send a message: is the battery all right? How far distant did you estimate the shore on the North side was from the Fort?"

"Oh, about a mile."

The day seemed endless. Even the meals, usually the best time absorbers, failed to provide an antidote to their impatience. The worst period was, however, the evening wait—the nearer the time approached the slower passed the minutes.

At the appointed hour the bed ladder was raised, and this time Mrs. Roberts, after strenuous efforts, managed to reach the window. She had taken up with her a silk thread unravelled from a stocking, in order to be able to haul up any small thing she wanted.

An examination of the window sash showed that it revolved on central hinges, which through years of disuse seemed immovable.

"Send me up a damp towel," she requested, "I must clean up the glass: a good blow or two would probably open the window, but might make too much noise, so I won't try."

Having cleaned the glass she looked out, and after

a moment of two noticing a fire on the shore opposite, asked Mary to pass her up the Mah Jong box matches and candles.

Lighting the candles which she had already fixed in the box, she held the latter against one of the panes. She must have held it for some time before she noticed that the light from the fire had become obscured. She therefore shut her light off by pushing in the lid.

The light on the shore again showed, whereupon Mrs. Roberts drawing out the lid, exposed hers. This was repeated three times—it could not be a coincidence.

Just as she was wondering what to do next she noticed the light from the fire go out and remain out; then to her delight came the intermittant twinkle of the Morse code.

She almost cried out in her excitement; then turning to Mary who was holding the bedsteads whispered “a message.”

The light was faint and unsteady; and she was also out of practice, but she managed after two or three repetitions of each word to comprehend the gist of the communication.

“Pass me up the torch, Miss Chapman.”

Placing it in a handy position she waited to see if anything more would come. Yes, another message was being sent out which she acknowledged. Taking up the torch she managed, with great difficulty to key out a message.

“Both here well but closely guarded, good-night.”

“I am coming down, but will send along the box and torch first,” she said to Mary.

Having received them, Mary prepared to help down Mrs. Roberts, a task which taxed all her strength.

On reaching the floor Mrs. Roberts subsided into a chair.

“I must have a few minutes rest before we undo

the beds, but I have good news," she said breathlessly.

She repeated Bobbie's message, also the one she had sent in reply, adding, "we must try to get one of those windows open to-morrow night."

"I hope," said Mary, "that no one has noticed this signalling : unless there is something important to say I think the less we do of it the better. The great thing is that each knows the whereabouts of the other. Patience will be required whilst the next move is being decided : help must come from the outside, we can do nothing by ourselves."

"We can do a great deal, Miss Chapman ; get one of these windows opened for one thing. I must do a lot of practice with the torch, I will take the battery out so as not to exhaust it.

The following night Mrs. Roberts, having secreted one of the table knives, again took up her post at the window. Working carefully all round it with the blade she cleared away a lot of dust and old paint. She then smeared the hinges with the contents of a bottle of oil which she had brought in order to keep away mosquitoes.

At last, after many fruitless attempts, she got the frame to move slightly, and by increasing her efforts with the knife, she at length got it open.

By the time this had been effected, it was almost the hour of calling up.

With the window open her torch would give better results. After resting for a few minutes she showed her light. It was immediately answered by the intimation that a message was coming.

"Have been round lake," it read. "Can see no entrance to fort, how did you get in ?"

Mrs Roberts replied.

"Don't know, unless important, don't send messages ; may be seen ; uses up battery. Show light this hour daily. Will do same to signify still here. Window open. Could squeeze through."

Mrs. Roberts, carefully closing the casement, smeared it with dust, then got down to tell Mary what had passed.

"I expect there is some hidden doorway which cannot be seen unless close to it," remarked May. "My gracious, you must warn Mr. Ritchie about the whirlpools."

"Yes, indeed I must, I ought to have thought of that. It just shows how carefully one must think out what is to be said before going near the window," replied Mrs. Roberts.

CHAPTER XI

APPREHENSION

When Mrs. Chapman became aware of her daughter's decision to accept the Rajah's invitation, she expressed her disapproval of the project in unmistakable terms, particularly so when she learnt that the trip was to be undertaken under circumstances which could only be described as clandestine. For two unprotected Englishwomen to embark on such a venture appeared to her not only unseemly but hazardous—however well intentioned their host might be. She had pleaded, remonstrated and finally threatened Mary, but to no avail. Seeing that her daughter was adamant, she decided that perhaps the best course was to accept the situation, trust to luck that all would be well, and that Mary's absence from meals for twenty-four hours or so could be accounted for by indisposition. Fortified with this hope she had impressed on Yussaf the necessity for secrecy—he was bound to be privy to the arrangements.

When, after a lapse of thirty-six hours, there was no sign of Mary's return, Mrs. Chapman became apprehensive : when forty-eight hours had passed her anxiety became acute. Deciding that secrecy could no longer be maintained, she sought out Mr. Day.

The Commissioner heard her story with ill-concealed annoyance.

"Am I to understand, Mrs. Chapman, that your daughter, accompanied by Mrs. Roberts, secretly left Sukanundi two days ago in direct defiance of my orders that no one was to leave the place under any

pretence whatsoever without my permission, or that of the Officer Commanding the troops ? ”

“ I am afraid, Mr. Day,” replied Mrs. Chapman in tears, “ that my daughter, who is very self-willed, asked no one’s permission ; I cannot answer for Mrs. Roberts. I did my utmost to dissuade her, but she would not listen. As to myself you will appreciate my reasons for silence : dependent on her for so much I did not wish to antagonise her, hoping that she would be back in the prescribed time.”

“ I think,” replied the Commissioner less harshly, “ that you acted very foolishly in not at once informing me of your daughter’s ill-conceived project . . . yes, I fully appreciate the difficulties of dealing with recalcitrant young ladies—I have two of my own, you know,” he interjected, as Mrs. Chapman attempted to explain that she only came to know of Mary’s intention a few hours before her departure. “ It places us all in a most awkward predicament. I can offer you no comfort until I have made certain inquiries.”

Investigations disclosed that Mrs. Roberts had asked for, and obtained leave to spend a day or so with Miss Chapman, ostensibly to go over the details of an entertainment for the troops ; that as her quarters were some considerable distance from those of Miss Chapman it had been presumed that she had made arrangements to stay at the guest house. She had not returned. Further, that Bobbie Ritchie had obtained three days’ leave to fish some waters, placed at his disposal by the Rajah, who had also left Sukanundi.

“ What do you make of it, Gresson ? ” inquired Mr. Day, when discussing the situation with that officer.

“ Some damned feminine escapade which will lead to no end of trouble. I don’t know whether Ritchie’s trip has anything to do with it or not, but we will know to-morrow when he returns. I can’t

believe the Rajah would have the audacity to abduct two Englishwomen, unless indeed he had heard news unfavourable to our cause—remember, we have heard nothing since we left Nadirpur.”

“ A miserable appreciation of the situation, as you say in the Army, my dear Gresson, but very similar to what I would have said myself. As a youth you must have exhausted your talents, as I did, in a successful attempt to pass an examination in subjects having no bearing on your career. Have you any suggestions regarding the line of action we should take ? ”

“ None, Sir, we must wait for further news. I can't send off part of the garrison on a peripatetic mission to hunt for the ladies, one might as well search for them in the Amazon Forests : we must wait.”

Two days later Major Gresson sought an interview with the Commissioner.

“ I have a note from Mr. Ritchie,” he said, when he was shown in. “ His fishing trip was merely an excuse to follow Miss Chapman—although how he knew of her intentions I don't pretend to know—he dates his message from a place called Hamirgarh, saying that as far as he can judge the Rajah has disappeared with the ladies, but to what place he does not know. He and his servant are making inquiries : he ends by taking unlimited leave.”

“ All very vague and unsatisfactory,” remarked Mr. Day, “ but the Rajah has evidently detained his guests, whether by force or not we cannot say—as you know, the man is utterly unscrupulous and untrustworthy.”

“ Well, we can't do anything. I have tremendous confidence in young Ritchie, and as he seems interested in Miss Chapman, it is quite possible he is the right man in the right place.”

“ H'm,” muttered the Commissioner, gnawing his pencil ; “ I don't see what a young inexperienced

officer like Ritchie can do. He does not know a word of the language. Lawrence is the sort of chap to tackle a problem of this sort—I am too old and conventional to cope with the present day antics of young feminines."

"There is a bazaar rumour that the troops are moving up the Railway to Nadirpur," interrupted the Major; "we might try to get a runner through to report on the situation. Lawrence is sure to be with them, and may be able to suggest something: in his capacity of special Commissioner in these parts he has very wide powers—might threaten to *unfrock* his Highness or something of that sort."

Mr. Day feebly smiled.

"Lawrence isn't the sort of man to be drawn into a petty matter of this kind."

"I'm not so sure. Harold Lawrence is on fairly intimate terms with Miss Chapman; bigger men than he have been drawn into smaller matters where the feminine sex was concerned."

"Well, you can try it, Gresson. I will encipher a report; you can do the same in your capacity as Commandant. But we shall look very foolish if it turns out that Miss Chapman and Mrs. Roberts have voluntarily eloped—so to speak—with the Rajah."

"I don't think that is a likely proposition," replied Major Gresson; "Mrs. Roberts is not only a steady sort of person, but not the kind an Oriental rake would select for abduction. Miss Chapman is in a different category, but . . ."

"I don't like your vocabulary, Gresson, we aren't dealing with a nautch girl escapade."

CHAPTER XII

HAROLD LAWRENCE IS CONSULTED

"What do you think of that, Pertab?" inquired Lawrence as he pushed the former a few sheets of paper; "brought in this morning from Sukanundi, distant about one hundred and fifty miles by a runner—quite mediæval, in fact, almost incongruous in these days of wireless and aeroplanes."

Pertab, taking up the papers, began to peruse them whilst Lawrence went on with his work.

Both men, in shorts and shirt sleeves, were seated under a shady tree whilst close at hand were three or four tents. A little farther off could be seen more tents, two or three of which, of the hangar type, gave shelter to aeroplanes.

The Englishman bore all the traces of hard work and exposure to tropical weather, for he was gaunt and deeply sunburnt. In his position of Special Commissioner to the Nadirpur Flying Column he had experienced a trying time. There had been little or no fighting—just a few scraps with irreconcilable railway employees and sundry other malcontents. His main task had been the pacifying, by peaceful persuasion when possible, of villagers and townsfolk dangerously disaffected by years of systematic anti-British propaganda.

Since the troops were practically tied to the railway, either as guards or as supervisors of forced labour employed in repairing the damage to the permanent way, Lawrence had to rely on his own personality to effect the reconciliation—a process demanding all the powers of his alert mind, and no small degree of valour.

A great deal of his work was accomplished by aeroplane, a means of conveyance which enabled him to visit many villages and small towns too far distant to be reached by the troops—even if available—or on horseback. It was on such expeditions that he had to accept risks from hostile inhabitants.

As soon as he had been able to estimate the extent and scope of his duties, he had asked for, and been granted, the assistance of Pertab Singh, whose skill and eloquence in talking round waverers was remarkable.

Further, at this officer's suggestion, Lawrence had added to his staff the interesting personality of Miss Lucy Mead, who, when circumstances suggested it, was introduced amongst the purdah women.

"You have got to restore the right feeling in all quarters," urged Pertab Singh when Lawrence showed a disinclination to the introduction of the feminine element. "Fashion," argued Pertab, "plays just as important a part in the affairs of Indian women as it does in Western European ones. The vogue at the moment is to be anti-British ; we must change that. It is no use pacifying the males, if when they return to their zenanas they are to be greeted with contumelious upbraidings."

Pertab won the day, hence Lucy Mead's introduction into Lawrence's affairs, both State and private.

Supported by these two energetic characters, Lawrence soon discovered that very little real force was necessary. Just at first, whilst the triumvirate were establishing their reputation, opposition was encountered ; but the judicious use of a few bombs, remarkable for the noise and smoke they made, rather than the damage they did, quickly overawed the more virulent extremists.

The ascendancy of the Sirkars—three flying ambassadors—very soon asserted itself over the huge area under Lawrence's control. As is usual in the

East, rumour invested them with theocratic powers—their omniscience spread with a rapidity outstripping the telegraph.

Pertab put the paper down.

"Perhaps you know, Sahib, that I am a relation of the Rajah of Mundapur. He is a degenerate scoundrel of a most unscrupulous type and evidently a fool. This means his end as a ruler."

"Probably," assented Lawrence, "but can you suggest any means by which we might secure the release of the two ladies: for the moment the man is a faithful and valuable ally of my Government by virtue of having given sanctuary in his hill station to the garrison of Nadirpur when that place was shattered by the recent earthquake."

"I think, Sahib, that I had better fly to Sukanundi in order to see for myself what the situation is. If I have to stay longer than I anticipate, the pilot can bring the machine back. Apart from the difficulty of landing in such a country—I know it well—the direct use of an aeroplane to search for the ladies might urge my kinsman to some excess: landing at Sukanundi will cause no comment. If you can spare me for a few days I may be able to effect their release."

"Of course you know Miss Chapman as you entertained her at Bheemgarh," remarked Lawrence smiling; "you are also probably the only man in India who might be able to persuade the Rajah to give up the ladies without a fuss. You can go. I should take as much petrol as you can carry; if you don't want it, you can dump it at Sukanundi, where it may be useful."

"Do you mind if I take Grey as pilot? He has the right mentality for the sort of job this affair may develop into."

"I don't quite associate Grey with peaceful persuasion, Pertab, but if you want him, you can have him. You can inform Mr. Day, the Commis-

sioner, who is at Sukanundi, that I have his dispatch, and that we hope to re-open the line to Nadirpur in about three weeks' time. You can call at Column Headquarters to inquire if they have any messages or letters for the garrison at Sukanundi. I don't intend to mention the matter to Major Chapman."

"Or Miss Mead?" put in Pertab; "you probably know that she and Miss Chapman are great friends."

"I'll think about it: you don't propose to take her, do you?"

"Not just now, but I might want her later on—she is a very remarkable lady, Sahib."

"She is," agreed Lawrence, "most remarkable."

In under an hour Pertab was speeding northward towards Sukanundi. He arrived there about sunset. His interviews with Major Gresson and the Commissioner were very short. From the former, he obtained the last known whereabouts of Bobby, and the fact—not mentioned in the despatch sent to Lawrence—that he was disguised as a Mahomedan accompanied by his servant.

"Have you any definite plans for securing the release of the ladies?" inquired Major Gresson; "if so, will you require any assistance from the garrison here?"

"At the moment I have no plans, Major, but the aeroplane will remain here for a few days. It might be as well to say that it brought despatches and that its departure is delayed by having to effect some minor repairs. Do you mind if I leave my uniform here?"

An hour later, Pertab Singh, dressed as an Indian, emerged from Major Gresson's quarters. He proceeded to the Bazaar, where he secured a bullock cart. By sunset he was lumbering along the road to Hamirgarh. He arrived there the following evening.

Discreet inquiries provided him with the information that a Mahomedan astrologer, escorting an afflicted relative, had passed that way some days previously and disappeared on foot into the jungle. No one knew where the Rajah was : he had arrived with two motor cars, which were still in the fort, accompanied by two white women. Since then nobody had seen anything of him or the women—they had disappeared on the lake.

Pertab decided that he must first of all find Ritchie since two parties, unknown to one another and engaged on a mission of this nature, might inadvertently cause each other serious embarrassments. It ought not to be a difficult task to locate him if anywhere in the neighbourhood ; two strangers could not exist in these jungles without their whereabouts being known to the Bhils.

He had a look at the lake to satisfy himself as to its extent, shape and character. His examination confirmed the opinion that the search could only be prosecuted by mounting himself and one or two followers. He discovered that three or four undersized ponies could be procured—at a price—also probably one or two attendants, although none of the latter seemed to relish the prospects of a sojourn in the jungle at this season.

After a careful scrutiny of the material at his disposal, he decided that one mounted attendant, with a pack-pony, must suffice. He, therefore, selected a man who, describing himself as a Bhil—obviously of a diluted variety—had served in a labour corps during the war, and, incidentally been consulted by Mehban concerning the tracks through the jungle.

Pertab accordingly purchased the three miserable ponies, engaged the man who rejoiced in the name of Budhu, and intimated that they would start the next morning.

“ By which side of the lake does the exalted one

purpose to travel ? ” inquired Budhu as he stowed away a generous advance of salary.

Pertab thought for a moment before replying—he did not want his movements to be broadcasted.

“ I don’t mind which side I take, but, if possible, I want to catch up the two Mahomedan strangers you mentioned, in order to persuade them to return.”

“ They were seeking some place many miles away, Huzoor ; you will never catch them up unless they have stopped, or,” he added significantly, “ the Bhils and wild animals have delayed them.”

“ We shall see,” replied Pertab.

CHAPTER XIII

RIVALS COLLABORATE

The next morning at dawn they set out.

"We shall keep at some distance from the lake and thus by avoiding detours travel quicker," counselled Budhu, as they were starting.

The ponies in spite of their emaciated appearance carried them well, and Pertab was very pleased with his progress, when, on the second day after leaving Hamirgarh, he rode into the hamlet where Bobby and his servant had stopped. Up to this point the only news they had gleaned was that two strangers had passed by on their way to some mysterious place where dwelt a healer of renown.

Dismounting, Pertab directed Budhu to make further inquiries whilst the mounts were rested.

He soon returned.

"I have good news for the Huzoor; the two strangers are in a hut near the lake a few miles away. Both stayed here a few days, one being very sick with fever: then they went to this hut because the sick one wished for quiet. A guide will take us there any time."

"Very well, Budhi, we will push on after a couple of hours' rest."

Pertab was in high spirits. He was astonished at the endurance of Bobby, whose disguise evidently had not been detected. "He must take a great deal of interest in one of the ladies, presumably Miss Chapman," he thought.

An hour's ride brought them to the hut, but there was no sign of either of the occupants, although plenty of evidence that they had not moved on.

Pertab ordered his man to tie up the ponies, and

he sat down by the side of the lake to wait. He was examining the Fort and its surroundings through his glasses when Budhu touched him on the arm.

"They have seen us, Huzoor, and retired into the forest."

"Who?"

"Those you seek."

Pertab started to move towards the hut. He had not gone more than a few yards, when an Indian wearing smoked glasses, emerging from the bush and covering him with a pistol, ordered him to halt.

Pertab Singh marvelling at the disguise—although he guessed at once it was Lt. Ritchie—did as requested, saying in English: "Lt. Ritchie, I believe, I am a friend; allow me to introduce myself as Captain Pertab Singh, who has been sent here to assist you. I can explain more fully when we have agreed that we are allies."

"I have heard the name Pertab Singh," replied the stranger, "but it is not an uncommon one: have you any papers on you by which I can assure myself of your identity?"

"I have."

"Then let us move over to the hut where we can make ourselves known to one another."

Pertab, producing a letter signed by Major Greson, as well as another in Lawrence's handwriting, quickly satisfied Bobby, who remarked: "When we first saw you I thought you were someone connected with the Rajah come to negotiate: let's shake hands."

"I am *connected* with the Rajah, being a kinsman: that is why I am here," laughingly replied Pertab.

"What am I to call you?" inquired Bobby. "I have no experience of Indians occupying your position."

"Call me Pertab. I deem it an honour to work with one who has undergone such hardships and skilfully maintained so excellent a disguise."

Bobby laughed.

"I have been through hell—if you know what that means," he said.

"Yes, Sahib, I understand—I was educated at Rugby and Sandhurst."

"Rugby! Why that is my old school; of course you left before I went there. I am sorry I can only offer you the very meagre hospitality of sharing my hut and perhaps the most atrocious food ever conceived."

"I am most grateful," replied Pertab; "I will make my man rig up some shelter for himself and your servant; it's a marvel to me you aren't seriously ill after all this exposure: by the way, have you been ill?"

"No; that was part of my disguise—in fact, the main part. Have you got a cigarette on you? I don't know which I pine for most—a bath or a smoke.—I have not attempted the former, the rain being a sufficient menace to my make-up. As you can see I haven't shaved for a fortnight."

"I should if I were you—I mean shave—borrow my outfit," replied Pertab holding out his cigarette case; "take the lot, I have plenty more. You can easily keep the face recoloured; but to change the subject, I know Miss Chapman quite well, having met her at Canauj and elsewhere."

"Of course; I remember now her telling me about your throwing the bomb out: you also entertained her at your home when she got lost in some desert or other. How strange our meeting like this! However, it is getting late so you had better join me at my frugal meal; we can then discuss the matter which has brought us here."

Pertab was still more astonished when he sampled the food—a couple of chowpatties made from the coarsest grain and some broiled fish washed down by a tin pannikin of water from the lake.

"I have often lived like this, Sahib," he said,

" but I have not met many white men who'd stick it for as long as you have. You must let me take charge of the catering ; I will soon improve matters."

" I told my servant I would eat what he did," commented Bobby. " He is not exactly a gourmet, but we've managed to rub along somehow : however I have no objection to your taking charge. Now let me tell you all I know about ourselves, the captives and their surroundings."

Bobby gave a *résumé* of his wanderings, the finding of the small lake, the establishing of communication with the prisoners by means of the water melons. and finally by signal with Mrs. Roberts.

" Marvellous, Sahib ! " remarked Pertab, when he had heard the account.

" That's nothing to what is coming, Pertab."

" We have examined this lake as carefully as we dare without going on it. It appears to be separated from the big one by a narrow rocky strip about three hundred feet high—I will point this out to you to-morrow. I have also scrutinised the fort from every side through my glasses. Apparently there is no entrance to it nor have we seen anyone trying to enter it by day or night ; yet we know supplies reach it. Where the Rajah is, no one seems to know. He may be in the Fort, but since the first day of their incarceration, the prisoners have not seen him."

" A real mystery," said Pertab, " are you quite certain that no boat has been to the Fort during darkness ? "

" I can't swear to that," replied Bobby, " but on two nights when there was a bright moon, I and my servant kept watch from opposite sides—I will point out the places from where we observed—I know I did not fall asleep nor do I think Mehban did ; further, an old Bhil told my man that no boats were allowed on the lake, although on one or two rare occasions, the Rajah's launch had been seen on it,

which is also mysterious as we can find no connection between this lake and the other one. We know that the supplies go to an island on the big lake."

"What about making a light raft which we could paddle out to the Fort on some dark night?" suggested Pertab.

"I thought of that but feared discovery, in which case the Rajah would at once remove the captives to some other place still more difficult to find. The Bhils are friendly to us. I don't think they suspect the reason for our presence here—nor have they informed the boatmen who fetch the supplies that we strangers are about. No one else has seen us as far as we are aware."

"Are you sure the signalling has not been noticed?"

"Can't say, but should think not, or the prisoners would have noticed something. We have only exchanged a few messages, but every evening about midnight I show a light for a few seconds which is answered by Mrs. Roberts as an indication that all is well. If you care to be awake to-night you can see this for yourself."

"I will think it out," said Pertab; "in the meanwhile you had better turn in."

"Right; Mehban will call us at the correct hour, but really I don't feel a bit like sleep to-night."

Bobby lay down while Pertab lit a cheroot and concentrated on the problem before him.

It certainly was a conundrum, but until he had looked round he would not assume anything. He knew that his kinsman the Rajah was no fool—in the ordinary sense of the word. Evidently he had been attracted by Miss Chapman, just as he himself had been, and had taken advantage of all the disturbance to attempt her abduction—by no means a crime in the eyes of the average oriental ruler whose sexual desires often override the dictates of prudence.

Ritchie had partially explained Mrs. Roberts' presence ; it was evident, therefore, that the Rajah had preserved some sense of consideration for Miss Chapman by permitting the woman to remain. If only he could meet his kinsman, matters might be arranged. A message could be sent by the boatmen, but here again, the Rajah might, as Ritchie said, merely increase the vigilance of his guards. Having gone so far it was highly improbable that he would be amenable to peaceful persuasion. Any attempt of that nature would, he felt sure, lead to delay and failure. Then these stories of there being no visible entrance to the Fort, nor water communication between the two lakes ; yet supplies reached the prisoners. This mystery must be cleared up at once. The only way of effecting the escape of the ladies was to get them out the way the supplies went in. Having come to this conclusion Pertab dosed off, and after a while was awakened by Bobby as arranged.

The latter directing his torch on the Fort, switched it on. For a second an answering light appeared in one of the upper windows. " Our all's well," remarked Bobby ; " we can return to our downy couches."

" H'm ! " said Pertab, " you've missed your vocation, Ritchie ; you ought to be in the Criminal Investigation Department. I am now going to swim out to the Fort. How far do you judge is the distance ? "

" I can tell you that exactly, Pertab—1,650 yards—I've measured it half a dozen times, in the hopes of bringing the bally place nearer," he added. " I couldn't cover that distance and get back again ; can you ? "

" Yes, I can do that and a good deal farther."

" I'll sit up until you return ; I can keep the fire going as a guiding mark ; by the way, I have been warned about the waters—something treacherous

although I must admit that I have never noticed anything."

"Don't waste good sleeping hours, Ritchie. If I do not return, you can't fetch me ; if I do, your welcome won't affect the escape of the prisoners. I can steer by the breeze : I will strip now and be off."

"Well, *bonne chance* ; I wish I could come with you."

Pertab went down to the shore, removed his clothing and slipped into the water. He found it quite warm. There was just enough moon to enable him to discern the sombre looking silhouette of the fort. He settled down to a good steady breast stroke which in half an hour brought him to the walls. As he got close he took special care to avoid splashing, his lithe and supple limbs almost impelling him forward without physical effort. He soon felt his feet touch some rocks right under the walls. Here he rested about five minutes before commencing a circuit of the Fort.

No trace of an entrance could he find, either at the water's edge or higher up. The first openings in the walls were forty feet above the water, and above them at the height of sixty feet was another row of small windows. Twice he made a circuit of the walls in order to assure himself that he had not overlooked some semi-concealed door. Once or twice he rested on the rocks to listen, but not a sound could be heard. The situation was baffling. As he swam back he turned the problem over and over, but could think of no solution. Having collected his scanty garments he threw them over his arm and strode towards the hut hoping everyone was asleep. To his embarrassment he found Bobby wide awake sitting over a smouldering fire on which was simmering a bowl of milk.

"Here is a warm drink for you and close at hand are a couple of cotton sheets wrapped round some hot stones. You see my welcome is of some use

since I am able to warm you inwardly and outwardly," remarked Bobby with jocularly, as he handed Pertab the bowl. "By jove, you are a beautifully made specimen of the human race," he added, as his eye ran over the symmetrical body still glistening with water.

Pertab, who felt distinctly chilly, drained the bowl, then dried himself down in front of the glowing embers after which they both sat down for a smoke and chat.

Pertab related his experiences.

"You see I am right," said Bobby; "there is no visible entrance. The only means of getting them out is to send them a message saying we will have a raft out at a certain hour when they must let themselves down from the window by the bedclothes or something."

"I doubt," replied Pertab, "if there is enough bedding of the requisite kind; we are not in England; further, it would be a risky undertaking only to be resorted to as a last resource; we must think of something else; but until I see the place by daylight I will not commit myself to any suggestion. Let us turn in."

The next morning Pertab set off with Bobby to make a complete circle of the small lake, being careful to remain concealed. He examined the island in the larger one through glasses.

"There seems to be a sort of temple on it, Ritchie, but nothing else. I can't solve the problem; force will effect nothing. I might return to Sukanundi, fly over here and bomb that island, but would that secure the prisoners' release? I don't think so. There must be some secret way into the Fort which we cannot as yet discover: even if we knew of it, days might elapse before we could turn it to our use. I have thought of sending a message by the boatmen to the Rajah—if he is about—asking him to see me; but even if he agreed to do so, I feel convinced

he would not accept my proposals ; further, having seized me, he would probably move the ladies to some still more inaccessible place. I must think it out. Let us return."

Bobby felt depressed. "Is there nothing we can do but wait and wait?" he inquired.

"I am thinking out a plan which presents a good many difficulties, Ritchie."

On arrival at the hut Pertab sent for Budhu and inquired if he had gleaned any information.

"Not a great deal, Huzoor—the people in these jungles are very ignorant, but one of the older men tells me that the island in the big lake is a sanctuary for several Brahmin priests ; that there is an old tale of how from a small rock it became a big one in the days of the present Rajah's father, who lived to a great age and in whose time the fort in the small lake was built. There is a legend that the island became big by the digging of a tunnel under the waters to a castle, also that there exists a secret way by water from one lake to the other."

"That is good news, Budhu. You can go."

"I have brought some flesh of the deer, also fruit, Huzoor."

"That is also good," remarked Pertab as he turned away to impart the news to Bobby.

"So that explains matters," replied the latter, "we must seize the island by a surprise attack."

"I fear, Ritchie, four of us can hardly do that : even if we were successful we could not find out how to use the information we possess. The man who took so much trouble to prepare these mysterious places, probably exercised much ingenuity. Being an Indian I understand the love for intricacy which underlies these undertakings."

"But," persisted Bobby, "if we made ourselves masters of the island we could compel them to disclose the secrets."

"Perhaps, but we do not know if these stories are

true. We should look very foolish if, having captured the island, we found that they were myths. Capturing the island would not ensure capturing the Fort, which may be independently guarded. Our only chance lies in stealth. I have thought of a plan. I leave here to-night. I shall probably be away two or three days. During my absence get two rafts made capable of carrying four or five persons each : fashion some paddles : I will tell Budhu to assist where he can, but I want him for other work ; also I don't want more people brought here than necessary,—it might attract attention. Remember stealth must be our watchword."

Then calling up Budhu he ordered him to get two of the ponies ready. " I shall be back in an hour's time, Ritchie."

" Take me to that clearing we passed through on our way here, Budhu," commanded Pertab. " I think it is about five miles away."

On arrival at the spot he went carefully over the ground.

" I think it will do," he murmured to himself.

" Budhu, I am going off for a couple of days : during this time you must collect enough Bhils to clear this ground of all branches, and all stones bigger than this one—" indicating one he held in his hand—" also cut down all these smaller trees and bushes, filling up any big holes. Do you understand ? "

" It shall be done as the Huzoor orders : I was a Dafadar in a labour battalion and so understand these matters."

" The night after to-morrow, about midnight, you will light four bonfires at the four corners, then with a dozen or so men await my return, which will be during darkness or not at all.

" The Huzoor's arrival will be duly honoured by the illuminations, but will he arrive with soldiers, because many things will be required ? "

" I shall only require what I have ordered, Buhdu : we shall now return to the lake."

He found Bobby already busy collecting material for a raft.

" A light meal, Ritchie, then I am off," he remarked as Bobby began discussing rafts.

" Before I forget it ; you must warn the captives they should be at the window ready to descend about midnight—let me fix the day—Friday."

" You mean the night of Friday-Saturday," inquired Bobby with military preciseness.

" Yes."

" Shall I give them any inkling of how we are going to get them out ? "

" No," replied Pertab, " we don't know yet how we are going to effect their escape : just tell them to be there on chance, but ready to come away : you'd better arrange a short signal for *nothing doing*, in case we are not ready, or some hitch intervenes."

CHAPTER XIV

BHEEMGARH AGAIN

Riding all through the night, Pertab arrived at Major Gresson's quarters in Sukanundi the following morning, very wet, very tired. He at once sent a message to Grey to be ready to fly ; then gave Major Gresson a short account of his moves, eulogising Bobby's endurance and persistence.

" There is some mystery about the whole affair, which up to the present I can't unravel," he winded up. " Ostensibly the Rajah has kidnapped the ladies, but how they arrived at their present abode without consenting I do not know. It is just possible that I shall be able to secure their release during the next forty-eight hours, but it is only a chance, so please say nothing about it. No, I shan't change as I must stick to these garments. I would like a bath and a meal, then I must be going."

Pertab found Grey ready.

" Can you," he inquired, " carry, say, a light man, a boy and about two hundred pounds of other stuff, in all four hundred weight, besides you, myself, and the mechanic ; distance about five hundred miles ?"

" No, I can't, Rajah."

Grey always addressed Pertab thus when they were alone.

" Very well, then the mechanic must stay here for the present."

" That's risky if your destination is one where there are no other aircraft."

" Never mind," replied Pertab, " can you do it if we drop the mechanic, taking just enough petrol for the journey ? "

"I don't mind trying, if that is what you mean, but I wouldn't exactly suggest it as a joy ride, especially in this weather," he added, casting his eyes at the threatening clouds.

"That's good enough for me, Grey. Jettison the mechanic and as much petrol as you think safe, but be quick about it as it is going to pelt rain again."

The final preparations had hardly been completed when the rain came down almost blotting out the landscape.

"Get her away, North by West, Grey, we will soon run out of it."

"Hope so, because if we don't we shan't come down until we probably crash." The engine roared and the machine rose rapidly, banking slightly as she was put on her course.

The sensation of driving through tropical rain and monsoon clouds is bewilderingly disconcerting; everything is completely obscured; one loses all sense of direction.

"Grey is not far wrong," soliloquised Pertab; "if we don't run out of it we'll be wrecked for a certainty; yet somewhere ahead lies a zone rarely reached by even the most vigorous monsoon; it would be very bad luck if, on this particular occasion, we encountered rain all the way."

For over a hundred miles they thrashed through the impenetrable pall, then as Pertab had anticipated, the sky cleared, and they emerged suddenly into that dazzling sunshine which year in and year out pours down its scorching rays upon the vast sand wastes of the Indian desert. They were evidently at a great altitude and, as it was impossible to discern anything on the ground, Pertab asked the pilot to descend a little. Soon they were cruising along a few hundred feet above the sandy billows.

Pertab, calculating they must now be near his home, directed Grey to circle round; but no trace of the fortress of Bheemgarh being visible, he began

to think that they must have gone astray in the clouds. The sun was getting low on the horizon. Once darkness set in landing would be difficult.

"Get up a bit higher," he said. The machine began to climb whilst Pertab eagerly scanned the vast wilderness below. Suddenly he espied what he was in search of—the setting sun's rays playing on the battlements of a fort beside which appeared a small green patch enclosed by four walls.

"That's it," he murmured to himself, and then directed Grey's attention to the spot. "There is a first-rate landing ground about five hundred yards distant from the North side of the main building," he informed him.

"I'll take your word for it," replied Grey as he began to descend preparatory to landing.

In a few minutes the machine came to a standstill on a level piece of sandy ground which had been prepared as a polo maidan.

Pertab got out.

"This is my home, Grey, and here we shall spend the night : I will fetch some men as guard for the machine, then take you to your room."

"Looks a bit dessicated, Rajah, and I see some coves hurrying towards us."

Pertab glanced in the direction indicated by Grey and recognised his uncle accompanied by several retainers. The old man, attracted by the droning of the engine, as the machine approached, had watched it alight, then hurried out to see the strange sight.

Greetings having been exchanged, the Thakur inquired the reason of his nephew's sudden appearance.

"I have come to fetch my Ghors," replied Pertab, "but just now I want three or four men to sleep by the machine in order to see that no one meddles with it during darkness. There is a sahib in charge of it who must come to my room for the night."

Then turning to one of his own servants who had

come up, he ordered him to return, prepare a room, hot baths, and generally make arrangements for the guest.

"Now let us go to the machine, Uncle," he continued, taking the old man's arm.

"Certainly, my son : I live in strange times when many new inventions are constantly appearing, of which I know nothing but rumours. You have told me that men fly great distances in bird-like machines, but I never expected to see you arrive in one at Bheemgarh."

They found Grey busy making things secure for the night, Pertab introduced him as the pilot or driver of the machine. Then having ordered four men to return to the Fort, fetch their bedding and sleep by the machine, he showed his uncle as much of the aeroplane as the failing light permitted.

"The old books of Hind tells us that Hunaman flew to Ceylon, my son ; perhaps the ancient people of the world knew of these things."

"That is only a myth, Uncle. I am sure the ancients never had aeroplanes, never were able to fly."

"Myths," retorted the old Thakur vehemently, "have we not trained the horse and camel ? Centuries hence when motor cars and other contrivances have banished them people will call them myths : are not your Ghors, strangest of creatures, even now almost a legend. Who knows but that there may have existed some great bird which man trained to his use. Who knows ? Who knows ?"

"Well," laughingly replied Pertab, "I cannot contradict that. Did not Urjuna fly across the sea in a chariot ? What is this thing but a flying chariot ? But it is getting dark, so let us go in."

They all made their way to the Fort where Pertab, having shown Grey to his room, went off to interview his Ghor keeper.

"Have them each in a separate sack," he commanded ; "I will order a bullock cart to be here at

dawn to convey you, the boy, and the Ghors to the machine : you must bring food for yourself and the animals."

After supper the old Thakur joined his guests, but Grey unable to understand the conversation, and feeling that his presence was not perhaps wanted, excused himself on the grounds of being tired.

Uncle and nephew talked on for some time, Pertab giving the latest news and explanations regarding the political situation.

" I am an old man and weary of trying to understand these matters," remarked the Thakur, " but I am often perplexed by the Sirkar's actions. Why do they permit these malcontents to disturb the country ; then resort to new laws, and even weapons, in order to rectify matters ? It is such an expensive wasteful method. In my young days we considered prevention better than cure, but now the Government seem to reverse that old adage, with the consequence that they have to concoct cures for diseases which they themselves have introduced. I am bewildered by these inconsistencies ; but tell me, for what purpose do you want these Ghors : cannot your machine do all and more than these animals ? "

" I want them for the purpose of rescuing some persons from a fort which we cannot capture nor destroy without killing everyone in it ; so you see, Uncle, that the century old methods still have their uses at times."

" They always have, my son. The world changes little, and human nature not at all—good night."

Very early the next morning Pertab and Grey repaired to the aeroplane.

" How are we for petrol ? " inquired the former.

" Good for two hundred and fifty miles : where are you making for ? "

" Sukanundi first of all, then a matter of fifty or sixty miles in the dark—we shall have to take on more fuel."

"Do you propose landing during this night trip?" inquired Grey apprehensively.

"Yes, but I have fixed up the place all right: I did not let you down here: it won't be a Croydon, but good enough."

At this juncture the bullock cart arrived.

"A miscellaneous cargo, which has got to be fitted in somehow," commented Pertab as the creaky cart made its laborious way through the sand.

Grey eyed the keeper and his boy suspiciously.

"Are you collecting freaks: What kind of complex do you expect to liberate by this outfit: we'll have to put up the quarantine flag if we sail with these goods. What are the contortionists in the blooming sacks?"

Pertab laughed. "You are not far off the mark. I do hope to liberate what you call a complex by means of the two pets wriggling about in the sacks, but let's put them on board and get away."

The cargo was stored—after some difficulty with the pets—then, Pertab, embracing his uncle who had come down to see the start, climbed up, and Grey starting the engine, the machine soon rose leaving behind it a miniature sand storm which immediately obscured his uncle and those around him.

They landed at Sukanundi without mishap, nor did they encounter any rain.

"I want you to fill up and be ready to start about midnight," remarked Pertab as he got out: I will explain details later. Take food for three days and plenty of it."

"Have these goods to go on?" demanded Grey, with a comprehensive gesture towards the wizened Ghor-keeper and his charges, "because on this occasion I would like to have my mechanic with me."

"They must certainly come: but if you think you can manage the mechanic, take him," answered Pertab.

"As we shall not want much petrol I think I'll take him, Rajah."

"Just as you please, Grey, but don't cut things too fine as regards fuel : we might want some more than what will carry us there and back. Now I must go, as I have several matters to attend to, but remember, I must leave about midnight."

CHAPTER XV

RESCUERS

On his return, Pertab explained to Grey the approximate position of the landing place.

"I have arranged for bonfires to be lit at the four corners, so there ought to be no difficulty in spotting it, seeing that there will be no other lights visible for miles round. If there is a hitch we must return here, but I want you to make as little noise as possible when we arrive within ten miles of so of the place."

"I will do my best, Rajah, but it is none too easy shutting off the engine and take to gliding stunts in the dark, even if you have had prepared the most perfectly illuminated landing ground."

The twinkling lights of Sukanundi were soon lost to view amidst the night haze as the machine began its flight over the primeval forest. Fortunately there was no rain although the sky was heavily overcast with monsoon clouds. Within an hour the bonfires of Pertab's extemporised aerodrome became visible.

Down swept the machine. A slight jar, followed by several others in rapid succession, announced that they were running over a surface not quite so good as Pertab had hoped, and in a few seconds the machine came to a standstill with a particularly vicious kick.

"I have known worse," remarked Grey to Pertab as the latter was preparing to get down.

Pertab blew his whistle, then waited.

Budhu, panting audibly, answered it in person—he had evidently been running.

"Where are the others?" enquired Pertab.

"They have all run away into the forest as fast as their legs would carry them," replied Budhu between his breaths; "they thought this machine some evil night spirit, Huzoor."

"And what did you do?" demanded Pertab quizzically.

"I tried to stop them but could not do so, then hearing the Huzoor's whistle I came here," adding with a comical touch of hauteur: "I have seen these machines before, the others will not return before daylight, probably not many then. I have had four grass huts built close at hand for the Huzoor and those with him."

Pertab asked Grey what he and his mechanic would care to do; stop in the machine or take to the huts.

"Oh, we'll remain here till daylight, but we would like the cargo shifted."

"They must remain, at least the sacks: the helpers I hoped would be present have bolted."

"Let 'em all stop—it's only a few hours to daylight," replied Grey.

Pertab went off with Budhu to get what sleep he could. Twenty-four anxious hours lay ahead of him during which he might have to undergo physical and mental strain.

Pertab awoke to find it raining in torrents, the spray from which penetrated to every corner of his leafy hut. Having partaken of a half sodden chota hazari prepared heaven knows how by Budhu, he took stock of his surroundings.

About two hundred yards away in the midst of a small lake stood the aeroplane, almost obscured in a spindrift formed by the impact of the rain on the wings.

" Phew ! " exclaimed Pertab, as he took in the scene, " not a propitious outlook ! "

Recovering a waterproof cape which he had used as a ground sheet during the night, he threw it over his shoulders and stepped into the downpour. Having with some difficulty made his way to the aeroplane he called to Grey.

" My sacred aunt," ejaculated that officer, who, hearing the voice, thrust his head out into the deluge. " Clamber up, Rajah, and tell me what's the programme, but remember I ain't a seaplane, although I do seem to have landed successfully on a considerable piece of water."

Pertab laughed. " You look like a permanent fixture here : thousands of years hence the fossil remains of this organism will be laid bare from amidst the morasses of this jungle."

" I take it you can remove the menagerie," suggested Jenkins, " otherwise they and their belongings will, as you foretell, join the fossilising process, thus adding to the arresting discoveries hereafter ; but jesting apart, I do not feel in a facetious mood just now. We must get the organism, as you call it, out of this super-puddle as soon as possible, and to do so I must off-load the cargo. Then if you will commandeer help we can move the bus to a less watery sepulchre, where I may perhaps do a Lazarus stunt : but what's the game, Rajah ? "

" First," replied Pertab, " I will relieve you, and future history, of the embarrassing litter : next, I want you to tell me if you can get off from here in the dark ? "

Grey viewed the extemporised, desolate looking aerodrome surrounded with forest.

" I can reply to that at once : I can't. It's a blooming marvel we landed without smashing ourselves up : I might get away in daylight provided this Niagara ceases."

" Very well, Grey, I'll assume for the present that

you can, if required to, get away in daylight, in which case I want you to be ready to leave to-morrow morning. The menagerie may, however, be replaced by two ladies."

"Ah!" said Grey, "I thought there must be a petticoat behind all this flitting about: what's the colour scheme?"

"White, Grey, white."

"Some stranded missionary folk, I suppose, although what this Godforsaken cargo has to do with missionaries, I dunno: there's some mystery behind all this, Rajah. Better take me into your confidence, then we'll both know where we are."

"I want to," replied Pertab, "but it's no use discussing with you a half-baked scheme—only wastes time by having to repeat it with modifications—I will tell you everything as soon as I can;" then ordering the Ghor-keeper to remove himself and his equipage to the huts, and impressing upon Budhu the necessity of persuading the terror-stricken Bhils to return in order to extricate the machine from its present position, he set out for the lake on foot.

He found Bobby busy looking over his Mauser.

"Leaving nothing to chance, I see," observed Pertab, as the weapon was hastily thrust aside; "if it ever comes to using firearms we're lost, but tell me how are the rafts?"

They are in the creek camouflaged with reeds. I tried them last night: they'll pass Lloyds all right."

"And the captives?" added Pertab.

"I sent a message through after a deal of trouble—the rain interfered a lot. They will be ready at midnight, but I am again warned against the treacherous waters—whirlpools or something—I have never seen any signs of them on these placid waters; did you when you swam out?"

"No, but we had better be on the alert for snags."

"I'm a bit of a waterman, Pertab, and not easily

rattled by a few unexpected currents or a largish ripple or two."

"Well, we must hope for the best, but there is probably something in the warning. I now propose unfolding our plan of action.

Bobby listened attentively until Pertab had finished, then said :

"Of course, you understand these animals you call Ghors : I have never even heard of them, much less seen their remarkable performances, but are you certain they can do what you propose ? "

"I am not certain, Ritchie : I have never employed them in the dark nor seen them used for amphibious work of this nature, but their trainer and keeper assures me that he has worked them at night, and that in the olden days they invariably accomplished their amazing feats during darkness. If we fail I don't think they will be to blame. Can you think of any other method of effecting the escape of those ladies ? I can't."

"I think the project amazingly daring and original," answered Bobby. "In the Army we are told that surprise compels victory : one could hardly conceive anything more surprising than the plan you have unfolded."

"Then it has your approval ? " said Pertab. "I thought by your tone that you thought it too *ifish*."

"I think it admirable. Everything we do in this world depends on an if—sometimes a good many."

"I am greatly relieved : now let us have something to eat, and after that I must return to the aeroplane to complete my arrangements."

Pertab rode one of the ponies back to the "aerodrome," where he found that Grey and his assistant with the help of sundry scared Bhils collected with difficulty by Budhu, had moved the machine to a piece of ground from which it could probably rise.

" Well, how go matters ? " inquired Pertab anxiously.

" If we don't get any more rain, I think we can just scramble clear," replied Grey, " but in daylight."

" I was hoping," continued Pertab persuasively, " that at a pinch you might be able to get away in the dark : the truth is I might want your assistance to-night. I have returned to fetch the cargo, and if you will accompany me you can then see for yourself the scene of our activities, hear all about it, then decide if you can throw in a helping hand."

" I'm game, Rajah : there's nothing more for me to do here until the time comes to get away for good."

Bobby was putting the finishing touches to the rafts, when Pertab, with his queerly assorted party, arrived. Having discarded his outer disguises, Ritchie, with his darkened face, khaki shorts and shirt, looked like a well set up young Sepoy, a circumstance instantly seized upon by Pertab to style him Dafadar Karim Khan when introducing him to Grey, who, mystified by the young man's English and blue eyes, felt that some enterprise was afoot which thoroughly appealed to his sense of unconventional adventure. Nor was he disappointed when he heard Pertab recount the plans for effecting the release of the ladies.

" But where do I come in, Thakur ? " he inquired.

" Your share," answered Pertab, " is in part somewhat nebulous. First, I want you close to your machine ready to fly to Sukanundi as soon as we can hand you over the goods. Secondly, in an affair of this nature one may strike snags. If we get into one of those unforeseen difficulties which calls for your presence over the lake, I will send up a rocket or two—yes, I brought along half a dozen or so from the Bazaar at Sukanundi—if you keep a look out they will easily be visible. Immediately you see one or more, you must fly over here and act as you

think best remembering that we shall probably be on two rafts and that the women may, or may not, be still inside the Fort. Thirdly, if you see no fireworks but find that we do not return by dawn tomorrow, you must show yourself over both these lakes, especially over the island in the next one behind that hill—we have no time to examine it now—but you cannot mistake it. You might drop a bomb or two close to it just to show what can be done. Repeat this demonstration over the Fort at Hamirgarh which is marked on the map, then proceed to Sukanundi ; tell Major Gresson what you know and after that rejoin Lawrence who doubtless will extract from you all he wants. In the last two cases you provide the psychological element. I hope all will go according to plan and that we shall not have to strain your theatrical talent too far, but you now know what's what, or, don't know, as I admit our requirements from you are a trifle vague."

"I hope you will want my theatrical talents : you can count on me to the last drop of petrol to raise some breeze round your Don Juan kinsman : never heard of a more intriguing affair in my life. I will clear off now, as I have several adjustments to make in view of what you have told me."

As soon as darkness set in Pertab and Bobby tried the rafts, the latter demonstrating his powers of moving them about.

"All very well for you, Ritchie, but none of my crowd have competed for the Diamond Sculls."

"Snag number one," replied Ritchie ; "I forgot about that, but my servant here has learnt enough to relieve me if necessary : you might borrow him."

"No, I will not interfere with your crew, Ritchie. You have got to get away with the booty. I will shift for myself."

CHAPTER XVI

DELIVERANCE

At about 11.30 p.m. Pertab, Budhu, the Ghors and their keepers on one raft, Ritchie and Mehban on the other, set out. The rain had ceased falling, but the sky being heavily overcast, the darkness was inky. Not a breath of wind stirred, and a sticky wet heat hung over the water like a blanket. Bobby led the way, steering by his luminous compass. Progress was tedious, especially with Pertab's heavily laden craft and inexperienced crew, but by midnight, just as he was speculating as to his position, he discerned a faint light high above the water, and simultaneously there loomed through the darkness the phantom-like form of the Fort—he had almost hit it plumb in the centre.

Not a sound could be heard as the rafts were made fast to a rock immediately below the window in which shone the tiny light.

The keeper selected the older and more experienced Ghor to make the ascent, and, assisted by Pertab, placed the creature in position against the wall. For a few minutes it hesitated, feeling the surface with its extraordinary feet, then slowly it began to work itself upwards.

"How will you know when it has reached the window, Pertab?" asked Bobby in a suppressed whisper.

"I estimated the height at sixty feet, Ritchie; as the line which it carries up is marked off with knots at one foot apart, the keeper, by counting them, knows approximately where the animal is, besides, we may see it against the light."

"I hope to goodness the ladies won't be scared to death when *they* see it," remarked Bobby.

"Miss Chapman won't be as she has seen them before. You told me she was to be at the window?"

"Yes, but the sudden appearance of a hideous brute like that might take her by surprise."

"I ought to have told you to warn them, but it is one of the chances, Ritchie."

Owing to the intense darkness, Bobby could not see what was going on, consequently it seemed to him fully half an hour before Pertab clambering on to his raft whispered: "Pull away for a few yards, I want to see if I can get a glimpse of the Ghor now, as it must be near the window."

Bobby manœuvred the raft to the requisite distance, but nothing could be seen of the creature.

"We might flash the torch on the window, Miss Chapman is sure to be there," whispered Bobbie.

"Too risky, Ritchie: the light might be noticed from the lower windows, otherwise I'd use it to locate the Ghor."

"I can stop mine down with my fingers to show only a pin point, yours would illuminate the whole side of the wall," persisted Bobby.

"All right, try it."

Bobby at once did as he proposed. He immediately received an acknowledgment from the window, but could see no trace of the Ghor.

"They are there," he murmured excitedly. "It's Miss Chapman, too; Mrs. Roberts would have acknowledged by a Morse signal."

"Get back!" ordered Pertab; "we must send the boy up at once; there is no time to be lost."

Pertab and the keeper held a moment's conversation after which a rope was attached to the little urchin, who taking the line from the keeper's hand, began his perilous ascent.

Again ages seemed to elapse before anything occurred. Bobby in his suspense moved himself on to Pertab's raft where he could keep himself abreast of what was taking place.

At last sundry jerks on the line held by the keeper indicated that something was happening.

"What is it?" inquired Bobby.

Pertab exchanged a few words with the keeper before he replied.

"The boy has signalled," he said. "They have a jerk code of their own—that the Ghor is not quite in the right place, the boy, however, has got hold of something to hang to whilst the keeper again manipulates the lines, which he is now doing."

Sundry tugs having apparently achieved what was wanted, a considerable period of waiting was necessary.

At last came the long hoped for signal. The boy had reached the window, made fast the larger rope which he carried up, and was about to descend.

In an incredibly short space of time he reappeared, followed by the Ghor.

A hurried colloquy took place between Pertab, the keeper, and the boy.

Then Pertab, turning towards Bobby, confided the news that one of the ladies was just inside the window ready to come down as soon as everything was ready; that the keeper would now go up and haul after him the rope ladder, and would then proceed to get the ladies out.

"Don't you think," suggested Bobby, "that either you or I ought to go up in order to assist them on to the ladder—clambering out of a window at that height on to a crazy ladder is a nasty job for those not accustomed to such feats."

"Well, I *had* thought of it," replied Pertab, "but *you* must not go, as I want you to be ready to make for the shore the moment the ladies are on the raft: it would merely delay getting them away if you went aloft."

"But I would come down with each," persisted Bobby.

"And go up again," put in Pertab. "No, you

don't ; besides, I am not anxious to have your twelve stone on the ladder at the same time ; but as you say, perhaps one of us ought to go, and as I have done the job before, I'll go as soon as the keeper has fixed up the ladder. Neither of us would ever get up that hanging rope : only those accustomed to walking up a wall could manage to get there."

The keeper disappeared upwards. In a very short time he started hauling up the ladder, and returned by it.

" Now be ready, Ritchie," enjoined Pertab as he started to ascend.

Once again an interminable length of time seemed to pass before the keeper touched Bobby on the arm to signify that someone was coming down.

Bobby could hardly control his feelings, as with his hands on the ladder to steady it, he felt someone slowly descending, rung by rung.

The darkness seemed more intense than ever. Peering up with straining eyes, he could see nothing. He could tell by the jerks that somebody was now close above him. He altered his grip on the ropes in order to reach higher ; his impatient hands trembling with a fever of expectancy. At last he felt a shoe against one of his fingers, and a moment later a trousered leg : then the full body. Desperately he whispered " Mary," and heard his name softly repeated. In a second he had folded the form in his arms, and lifting it off the lowest rung placed her on Pertab's raft.

" Be quick, Bobby ; where am I to go ? " Mrs. Roberts will be coming down."

" Bobby picked her up—she was evidently in pyjamas—carried her over to his raft and left her in charge of Mehban.

Just as he reached the foot of the ladder he distinctly heard what sounded like something heavy falling on one of the floors high up in the Fort. A moment later he felt the weight of someone on the

ladder—Mrs. Roberts was evidently descending—he tightened his grip on the ropes, wondering what it was that had caused the noise.

For a brief period the only sound which reached his ears was the slight lapping of the water against the foot walls. But what was that? Voices! yes, and blows rained on doors, followed by the clanging of iron against iron.

“Good God, we are discovered,” he murmured to himself, setting his teeth. As the seconds flew by he clung to the ropes. Would the woman never appear!

Lights were now visible in two or three of the windows. The hammering on doors increased. A crash, then silence, followed in a few minutes by a pistol shot. A second person on the ladder—probably Pertab forced to come down before Mrs. Roberts had completed her descent—thought Bobby.

A large panting form encumbered with skirts loomed just above him. Had it been smaller he would almost have torn it from the ladder.

“Come with me, Mrs. Roberts,” he said curtly, as he assisted her off the last rung and prepared to help her over the rafts.

“Push off, Mehban,” he ordered as he seized the sculls.

They had not proceeded twenty yards when he noticed a sudden agitation in the water, accompanied by a peculiar sound. Mary, who was crouching just in front of him seized his knee.

“The whirlpools, Bobby; we are lost if we get caught in them.”

Thus abjured he checked the raft’s onward movement.

“What whirlpools? I have never seen any,” he remarked.

“The dreadful whirlpools we warned you against—there are several—we can’t go on,” she cried almost hysterically. Bobby felt non-plussed. There was unquestionably some unusual disturbance in the

waters. Lifting the blade of the skull he looked at his compass. They had certainly been drawn out of their course.

Although still uncertain as to what was before them, he shouted a warning to Pertab—he evidently still had control. Now Bobby had not knocked about on the erratic waters of the Bina River without acquiring considerable experience of eddies and even rapids. Having assured himself of control over the raft when involved in the first current he again checked his unweildy craft. This time he noticed that he was being drawn in another direction. An inrush of anxiety surged through his brain. Were they trapped ?

Again he succeeded in extricating himself from the clutches of the current. By an effort he withdrew from the dangerous water by paddling back a short way : then an inspiration seized him.

If the castle was surrounded by mysterious whirlpools, as declared by Mary, there ought to be a lane between them where the pull of one neutralised the other ; consequently if he proceeded cautiously he ought to be able to get through along this lane : there was the risk that by misjudging the exact line he might become involved in one or the other, but danger lurked in whatever he did.

He was turning the matter over in his mind when he saw Pertab's warning rocket go up. That decided him. Fortified with the glorious courage and optimism of youth, he decided to attempt the perilous undertaking.

Exercising infinite care he pushed the raft gently ahead, carefully testing his drift every few yards. As he had anticipated, a lane of slack water was opening in front of him.

But what was that on the lake ? A searchlight moving rapidly across the water, its beam, thrown against the Fort, showing for a second Pertab's apparently deserted raft.

"The Rajah's launch," screamed Mrs. Roberts.

The next few minutes might have been crowded ones for Bobby had he not been absorbed in the critical work of navigation which demanded his entire attention.

With marvellous skill, almost amounting to uncanny instinct, he piloted the raft through the perilous waters until clear of the swirling eddies. Then for a brief moment he allowed his attention to be drawn towards the drama which was being unfolded before him.

The hum of an approaching aeroplane was audible. For a moment the launch's searchlight turned skywards, revealing the plane flying a few hundred feet about the lake, then back the beam swung to Pertab's raft, to be immediately followed by the sound of firing from the launch.

Bobby almost chuckled. It was obvious that the launch, prevented from closing on Pertab's deserted raft by the whirlpools, was firing into the blue: further the momentary flashing of the searchlight on the plane had lit up the shore ahead of him and disclosed its proximity; with any luck he could make it unnoticed—he therefore redoubled his efforts.

The aeroplane, now circling over the lake, was getting lower. Suddenly the launch's searchlight was extinguished. The darkness which supervened seemed impenetrable, whilst the roar of the unseen aeroplane, reverberating amidst the surrounding hills, gave the impression of some impending cataclysm of nature.

For fully a minute nothing further happened; then the machine dropped a star shell on the lake, and the rays fastening on the Fort lit up the sinister looking battlements for the space of a second. Deliberately the aeroplane began to search the face of the waters with more lights. Bobby stopped plying the scull in order to follow its path. To his consternation one was descending towards him, and

in a moment they were enveloped in its dazzling light.

He waved his oar frantically in the hope of conveying to those above him how little he appreciated this publicity : the machine moved on, searching the water in their vicinity ; then swept back again to the Fort only to renew its quest. Apparently the launch had disappeared. Bobby again bent to the task of getting to the shore.

" Stop," whispered Mehban, as the unmistakable chug chug of a rapidly approaching launch became audible.

Had it seen their raft when the aeroplane had flashed its fateful light upon them ?

A dull fear of impending calamity seized Bobby as the beam of a searchlight, suddenly switched on, illuminated them.

" Instant surrender or I fire," came in English through a megaphone.

" Don't, it's the Rajah's voice," implored Mary ; " better accept death."

" I won't," answered Bobby in an undertone, squeezing her hand.

" On what terms ? " he shouted.

" Unconditional, be quick, or I'll . . . "

The sentence was never completed

Like a gigantic bird of prey the aeroplane swooped down. A blinding flash, followed by a wave that swamped over the raft, then blackness.

The roar of an aircraft engine, with throttle fully opened, announced to the dazed, drenched and almost blinded occupants of the raft, the manner of their deliverance.

It took Bobby fully a minute to realise what had happened. " We are saved," he cried out exultantly, as he once again plied the sculls.

The aeroplane continued to circle over the lake, projecting its searchlight here and there. For a moment the rays rested on the raft, then, having lit

up the shore—now hardly a furlong away—made off.

In a few minutes they grounded. Bobby and Mehban at once jumped into the water in order to push in as close as possible to the beach.

"I will carry Miss Chapman to the hut close by," declared Bobby, addressing Mrs. Roberts: "I will then return for you, or Mehban can guide you to it."

"I'd prefer just to sit still here for a few minutes in order to collect my senses," replied Mrs. Roberts; "if you don't return in a reasonable time I shall put myself in Mehban's hands."

Bobby lifted Mary from the raft. She lay limply in his arms as he bore her to the hut. There he gently put her down, and then he got out and switched on his torch. She had fainted, or was stunned.

Rapidly stripping off her soaking pyjamas he wrapped her in the only dry article he had at hand—the old blanket he had used. Just as he had completed this and was wondering what to do next, she opened her eyes. Bobby bent down and brought his still darkened face close to hers until the light illuminated both features.

"We are quits now," he said smiling, as she clutched at the skimpy threadbare covering, "and, he added appealingly, bringing his lips close to hers, "let's perpetuate the intimacy for all time. Will you?"

"When you have extricated Pertab Singh, I may," murmured Mary gently pushing Bobby away from her.

"Oh, Pertab's all right, I'll wager," replied Bobby somewhat piqued at this unexpected display of solicitude for the Indian.

"Well, let me see him; then perhaps I will agree."

"One kiss, Mary, and I will go," urged Bobby, again bending towards her.

"No, not until you present me with Pertab Singh."

Bobby, getting up, went out to redeem his promise to Mrs. Roberts : he met her and Mehban making their way towards him.

" I have put Miss Chapman in the hut, Mrs. Roberts. You will find some shelter there. There will be a fire going soon, and I shall be able to bring you in something warm to drink."

It did not take long for him and Mehban to kindle a roaring fire. They then dried their wet clothes in front of it, whilst preparing hot drinks and food which, when ready, he carried to the hut.

" May I come in," he called.

" Certainly not, Mr. Ritchie," Mrs. Roberts answered with emphasis, ordering him to put whatever he had on the ground outside.

Bobby laughed.

" Here is something warm for you to drink and eat, Mary," he announced as he put the things down. There was no reply.

He therefore returned to the fire, took some food himself, then lying down to await daylight, fell into a profound slumber.

He was awakened by Mehban announcing that there was a sound of splashing water as if someone was approaching in a boat. Bobby, jumping up, ran down to the water's edge where in the dim light of the false dawn he could just discern the faint outline of something moving towards him.

" Who goes there ? " he shouted.

" Pertab Singh," came the reply.

Bobby almost waded into the water to greet him, so great was the relief at hearing the voice.

" Are you all right ? " he cried.

" Perfectly ; are you and the ladies ? "

" Yes," answered Bobby.

" How on earth did you get past the whirlpools," inquired Bobby as soon as Pertab and his party had safely landed.

" Look," said Pertab, pointing to the edge of the

water which was some feet below the usual mark, "that explains how I got away." They ran themselves out after a few hours, the lake is now as quiet as the proverbial mill pond."

"I believe I have gone one better than you, Ritchie. Before I heard your warning shout I'd already caught the sound of the launch's engine, so thinking it about time for fireworks, sent up a rocket. We then took to the water leaving the Ghors aboard. There we stayed up to our chins, keeping the raft between us and the launch whilst my kinsman splayed a few bullets about. When Grey downed the launch we got back on the raft; then I and Budhu climbed up the ladder which was still hanging there, in order to explore.

We found the room which had been used by Miss Chapman and Mrs. Roberts deserted. By the way, all our troubles arose from the latter kicking over the up-ended beds which had been used to reach the window, when making a desperate effort to force her way through the narrow opening. I went in, packed up the ladies' belongings, at least such of them as I could find, so here we all are after a good night's work. Now let us dry ourselves and get some food."

A motley, dishevelled, looking party were assembled at a picnic breakfast during which the night's adventures were discussed.

On conclusion of the meal Bobby asked Pertab to accompany him and Mary for a stroll.

When out of view of the hut they seated themselves on a fallen tree, then Bobby turned to Pertab.

"Last night I asked Miss Chapman to marry me. She refused to give me an answer until I had presented you to her. I now claim her reply.

"It is yes, Bobby," said Mary laughing.



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